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GRANTLEY GRANGE.

LONDON

ROBSON AND SONS, PRINTERS, PANCRAE ROAD, N.W.

GRANTLEY GRANGE:

BENEDICTS AND BACHELORS.

BY

SHELSLEY BEAUCHAMP.

‘ An early worshipper at Nature’s shrine,
I loved her rudest scenes—warrens and heaths,
And yellow commons, and birch-shaded hollows,
And hedgerows bordering unfrequented lanes.’

C. SMITH.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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GRANTLEY GRANGE.

CHAPTER I.

KILLING TIME IN THE COUNTRY—SNOWED-UP.

WITH the new year, as January came in, the frost came with it; the snow, which had been blowing about for a week or two, and even lay deep in places, ceasing for a while. And it was a sharp frost and a lasting one, for it continued. And skates were looked up, and the ring on the ice was heard; so it was all over with the hunting. Long and loud therefore were the lamentations from the country houses and the kennels, and from all the men in town, on whose hands time now hung heavily, as day after day

the same old cry was heard of 'ice and snow,' and 'frost again—no hunting,' till there really seemed to be no end to it, and that all the weather was made for the skaters only, who rejoiced over it in direct ratio to the bewailings of the sportsmen; men who said, 'The worst of it was, it was not only the stoppage of the fixtures, but the holiday it gave the foxes, who would, if it lasted much longer, get so fat and so lazy, that there would be no sport when they did get a run.'

And matters did not mend either; for they could hear from the carriers, who could now only reach town by being two or three hours late in a morning, through the roads being so bad, that in the country it was worse, worse even than in town, for the snow lay there, and they were almost snowed-up; and that on the high grounds between the covers on the hills, where the wind had lodged the snow in the gateways, there

were quite deep drifts already; and all out there said, 'We shall have one of the old-fashioned winters, depend upon it!'

It certainly looked like it; for out there in the hill country you could do nothing—nothing at least in the way of hunting, for ice had to be broken every morning for the cattle, and you could talk easily with people over the river. The birds too were about thicker than ever, and you seemed—for it was 'a white world' everywhere—to see further up the valley than you had seen for a long time.

And then, just as the glass, that you tapped and looked at more than usual, appeared to be going down a bit, it suddenly rose; and there came a keen north wind, and a cold blue frosty sky, and a nipping air, so hopes were at an end. Winter had at last set in unmistakably.

The robins came again beneath the windows; and clouds of rooks were seen, that

mixed with the starlings in the meadows, and blacked the snow, or scared the field-fares in the little paddock; for the weather was as sharp where we ourselves were that winter as it was anywhere, and we have cause to remember it; for our hunting also was stopped, and that effectually; so that we were quite as much bored by it as were any of the unfortunate folks in the Honey-brook country.

We can also call to mind how, with our two horses in the stable, unable to be ridden—but on whose backs we had hoped to show some of our friends out there ‘the straight way across country,’ and to our home friends, on our return, a brush and a pad or two—we used to resort to all possible devices to get through the day; and how diligently we trotted about the farm to ‘help’ to look over the things, and to count the sheep; and how we could not help wishing there should be some of them lost, and

that we should find them in a snow-drift, and so have to dig them out of it—anything, in fact, for excitement.

Our papers we read thoroughly, even to the advertisements; but we could do but little in letters; for it was the same old tale, ‘snowed-up,’ to tell people; and as the postman did not come till midday, and then could not wait—the pull up the woods was so heavy for him—there was not much done in the way of correspondence, as it necessitated a long walk through the snow for ourselves or the boy to take the letters to the post.

So when we had been ‘round the things’ in a morning with the farmer or his sons, we would take a turn about the hedgerows with the dogs and track the rabbits, or perhaps put up some of them in the kitchen-garden, or move a hare or two in the hop-yard, or come again on that cheeky old cock-pheasant in the shrubbery-orchard,

who, if he did stir, would simply walk away leisurely when we did come on him; or, going out in the front at midday, we should find those five stragglers of a covey that used to come upon the lawn—moving about in the shrubs there till they could drop over at dusk into the fold-yard.

We can also remember how, in that weariest of waitings for the frost to go, we had nothing to do but to notice the things that were about us, and to observe with regret how persistently dry the slate quarries in the kitchen would keep, and how free they were from the drip of the bacon in the cratches; and to remark on what a mockery it seemed for the clock on the stairs to cry ‘Cuckoo!’—the clock that was always kept three-quarters of an hour fast, and yet never ‘gone by,’ and that had a lot of intricate brass-work about it, and ‘Chepe side’ and an olden date under the maker’s name on the face of it.

And how, when we had looked through the paper after dinner, and had nothing more to do, we would stroll out into the back-kitchen, and pinch the batch-cakes there, and the loaves that would be just then out of the oven; or go up into the laundry that was over it, or into the ironing-room that went out of the laundry, where there were a lot of half-dead sticks of geraniums, and such a splendid view from the window, that looked over the lawn to the woods.

Then, after hanging about there till we were tired, and we had again seen the three famous views from the three windows, and had read 'Betsy Jones hurs a bad un,' 'Our Jem and Mary,' 'Bills a fool and Jacks no good,' and other equally entertaining inscriptions, that were scratched on the wall, where the pipe from the stove went through it, we would take a last look at the kiln-hairs, the old hat, the corn-sieve and the flour-bag in the corner, and the ironing-

stool and the wicker chair that were against the rails round the landing, and the stray feathers that were about—left from the feather-dressing—and then, descending the stairs into the back-kitchen again, get startled out of our ‘seventeen senses’ by the loud sound of the brittle sticks, as the girl broke them sharply on her knee, to ‘tind’ the fire up a bit—the fire that was on the hearth there—to ‘bile’ the kettle.

Nor do we forget how, having first startled us as to fire, she would immediately, the unfortunate creature, do the same thing by water, by turning the tap on with a rush, and then, staggering across with the heavy kettle, put it on to the pot-hook with a flop that would make the fire beneath it fizz again.

We have a vivid recollection of that girl. She had certainly some stir in her; and she ‘drabited’ the cats with energy, and the fowls that would persist in ‘keepin’ on’

coming in there she repulsed with vigour; and her 'Now out with it!' to the dogs when they brought their bones in was certainly to be commended; as was also her 'Now, Jem, I'll have none o' that, you know,' when the lad came in there to wash his hands, and brought the snow with him. Still, there were times when we could have wished her quieter. But there was no doubt she was a good servant; and her name was Clementina.

And then, having again taken stock of the surroundings, and noticed how shiny the girl's elbows were, and what a 'mother's mark' she had on her cheek, and how particularly thick her legs were—as revealed by her short dress, when she dipped suddenly to alter the hanging of the pot, or to push the sticks together a bit to hasten the boiling of it—we would go out from there, and under the pent-house to the dairy, where, had it been hot weather, we should

no doubt have appreciated the coolness of it, and have thought more of the cherry-red quarries, and the pretty array of the spotless ware—white, cream, and stone-tint—and the black-glazed pans and the milk-leads and the butter-skeel, and those primrose pats too, that seemed to be so intimately connected with the new loaves we had been pinching.

But it would be of no use our lingering there, as it would be cold enough then anywhere; so we would go through the door by where the churn stood, and have a turn again in the kilns; and for the twentieth time criticise the rude drawings and the writings on the walls, that were the handiwork of the hop-pickers when they had sat by the fires there in the ^{autumn} ~~winter~~, singing those songs that were more noisy than select; and again notice the hook from the ceiling, and think what an odd place it was for a swallow's nest to be on it, and yet

for that nest to be as well-built a nest as any that were in the kiln.

And we would also see that there had been as yet no use for the spades and the beetles, and the clod-crushers and things, as they were all still there in their place under the stairs, with the rest of the odds and ends. And going up the stairs to the drying-room and the bagging-room above it, we would have another sniff of the smell of the hops that remained there, and survey—as though we understood the whole thing—the bales of wool, that were there, ready tied up, for the first ‘good’ man who said ‘one and elevenpence!’

Then, ascending still higher, we would pick the eating apples over, that were sorted there, and pocket one of the best; and down again, and out from the bagging-room by the back kiln-door, where the ground was on a level with it, by the fagot-rick and the drying-ground, on the bank at the top

of the hanging orchard, where the view of the church and the village came in between the trees, and where we could watch for the postman in the morning, to see if he was in the lane, when we were waiting for our letters.

And if no small excitement even then offered, we would go down round the corner to the cider-mill, that was next to the kiln, and so poke about there for a while; and peep through the closed doors at the view over the weir, or through the bars of the shutter, where you looked into the orchard; and we would handle the drenching-horn again to see if we could make it out, and hit the sacking that hung down from the bagging-room, and think what a good 'hiding' we could give 'the bagger' if he were but in it treading the hops, and look at the kiln-hairs and the cider-hairs, and the baskets and the apple-pots, and the oddments that lay about there, and the chips

that were there in abundance, thrown down from the fagot-rick.

And then, if the people about the house were still busy, and no one came to take us out of ourselves, we should probably go to the stables, to see how the hunters were getting on in the loose boxes, and regard with a feeling of tantalisation the pads on the door; and look in the coach-house, and note the build of the dog-cart; or, hearing the rattling of their chains as they were feeding, go on into the cart-stable to the horses, and into the hackney-box, where the cob was; and then moon on to the cow-houses, and the bull's-house, and the boosy, and the calves'-pen, and the pigs'-cot; and thence into the big barn to the men, to sit on the side of the bay, and to chat with them; and after a stay there, go down perhaps into the vaults under it, but with a shrug of the shoulders at the cold, and a peep up the steps into the garden—where

they passed the lead-pipes down into the tub, at cider-making, to enable them to lade the cider into the barrels—soon come up again, and fraternising with the old dog as we came by his kennel, turn into the house, and find tea ready for us.

Those melancholy pipes too that we used to smoke so seriously at night, while discussing the chances of the weather, with our host and his sons—for they were all three of them hunting men—how well we remember them! And those mornings too, when, no matter what was the promise of change overnight, all would be the same again when we drew the blinds up, and were thankful that the days of shaving had departed—the same ‘white world,’ the same cold sky, and the same indications of frost continuing!

The moor-hens from the moat come up to feed with the fowls—the fowls themselves drooping and shivering under the

rick-steads, or crooning together against the ricks, unless the 'flip-flap' of the flail told them there was grain about, when they would rouse up, and take turn with the birds and the sparrows; the geese hanging about now that the pool was frozen, and standing with first one leg tucked up under their wings, and then the other, or squatted on the fodder to warm both; the cows and the horses, munching together amicably at the cribs; the pigs, less fretched and peaceable, runting about in the straw, and visible but at times; and the ducks, usually clamouring at the wicket for the scraps from the hands of Clementina, all lying down quietly under the long water-trough, that would be spiked with icicles at the bottom of it.

And when we used to turn out on the lawn after breakfast, with slight hopes, as a thin light snow would come whiffing down, just for ten minutes at a time—too cold for

it to continue—they would be soon dissipated by the ringing sounds we should hear, that told of frosty air and of frozen ground.

The sound of voices on the river-banks, and in the fields, as men called to each other; the noise of the lads who were on the pools, shouting while they were sliding; the loud tap-tap of the horses' hoofs as they were trotting to the farms or to market; the ring in the woods of the gun-shots, and the call of the keepers to their dogs there; and later on, the sharp sound of the horn—keen as a huntsman's—as the postman came down through the woods, late with the letters—all telling of the little chance there was of the frost going.

And first one fixture went, and then another, and then some handy one slipped from the list, lost and unhunted, or gone to wait its turn, when the frost should vanish and the turf be safe. And so without one run in the old country, we had to return to

our own home again; only, however, to find that it was quite as bad for hounds on that side of the country—snow, hardened, battened snow, and ice being everywhere!

So there was nothing for it but to look with vexation each morning at the horses in the straw-yard, when they were at exercise there—the gray and the roan, and the little black and the bay—doing their round and round with frosty breath; or watch them on the tan, each clothed up carefully with cloth and hood.

And great was the grief with which the saddle-room was visited, where work was wanted for the man and boy; for the bits and the bars and the irons still rested spotless, for they were still unused. It was with perfect wretchedness too, positive misery, that our boots were viewed; as each pair of tops recalled some first-rate thing when our legs were in them, and the grip was good. Inspecting ‘cords’ too only told of joys that,

as we slammed the drawer, seemed gone for ever!

At first we got along though pretty fairly, for we fed the birds that were hopping about in the garden on their tracks in the snow; and we watched the sparrows that were bumptious with the robins; and we fadded in the stable and glossed the horses, or led the pony out and took the dogs.

And on those days when our sweet village belle drove up with jingling bells and spanking bay, to skate, as was her wont, upon the pool, to show her pretty ankles beneath the scarlet, and play the deuce with fellows' hearts out there, we would do our best in 'figure eights' and 'edges;' and when she left, stroll up into the orchard, and switch the nettles as we smoked, and thought—thought of the young coquette, and warmly too—the charming, bright-eyed, loving-looking beauty—through the con-

necting-link of mistletoe, whose berries silvered there the gray-mossed trees.

Or we went into the coppice with the ferrets, or stocked the turf and pitched a quoit or two; or lit a weed and took the cue in hand; or did some double-dummy with our uncle, who, constantly revoking, looked to win; so, as we had to let him, play was useless; but anything was welcome to kill time till hunting came again.

Or we went for mental pabulum in books, and put all back again but those on hunting; or took a moon around that precious sanctum where—best of ornaments—were pads and brushes; our valued trophies, ridden for and won, that made us savagely anathemise cat, dog, and that old poodle-dog, the birds and pigeons, and everything that came just in our way.

But before long our maledictions were extended, for there was no help for it; and so all things came in for them, and even

blue pill was thought of. The good St. Anthony, who suffered greatly—so we are told, at least, in song that lives—suffered still more by close comparison, his grievances with ours, in that which tantalised. Had not the wind changed, things would have been serious; but a thaw commenced, which gladdened all our hearts; so we began at once to speculate on the fixtures, whether they would take them slipped, or as per list, the first come first, for the thermometer was rising and the glass going down, so that there really at last seemed a chance for hunting.

It was certainly all slush out of doors, and the country was heavy; but that would mend, and it was no matter if it did not—“Ware winter-wheat and spot the leading hounds.” If we were first and meant it, none could splash us; we knew our horses were all fit to go; and as to others—well, that was their look-out. If they got painted,

‘good mud would wash off;’ and if hounds but found a fox, dirt did not matter.

As the next fixture came, all hopes were raised, for the moon looked well and the wind was in the south; fieldfares and starlings too were less abundant, and there was far less chatter amongst the other birds. The moor-hens too were back about the moat; the fowls clucked noisily about the buildings; and the galænas once more cried ‘Come back, come back,’ as timidly they tiptoed round the hedges. The rabbits came less often in the garden, to crop the parsley and to nibble greens; and stray red apples there and in the orchard, left ‘for God’s birds,’ as is the usual custom, no longer looked as if they all were frosted.

The crack of ice, in breaking up, was heard, and the slide of snow in lumps too from the hedges; the drip, drip, drip of meltings from the eavings, where spiky icicles had lately frozen; the squashy tread

while all around was sloppy, and all sounds deadened, now that the frost at last seemed really going. The hills, no longer snow-capped, looked afar, and the woods and farms and all seemed now less clear than when white-topped, as they had been so long, they showed against the gray—the colour Nature takes for wintry skies, cold blue for frost; keeping the bright blue for the butterflies and flowers, song-birds and sunny days, sweet sights and sounds.

The robins too no longer waited underneath the window for the crumbs thrown to them from the breakfast-table; and when the pale sun, that had been so red, peeped out, they hopped upon the thorns, and sang there merrily. The hollies, berried over, shone out scarlet, down in the garden hedgerows and the shrubbery; and in the warmest borders there were crocuses, some very early ones, in clumps of purple, cloth of gold, and white; and snowdrop bells too,

and some christmas-roses, and pink hepaticas, that, as the snow slipped from them in the sun, showed one by one. And Delve the gardener called about the digging, and Pips had vanished with his clarionet. For all such welcome incidents, due thanks were given—special for the last!

At length the morning of all mornings came—the fixture, Prescott ; a catch of frost and rather clouding over, but cold and bracing—and it found us on the road with many others, leading our horses, that had frost-nailed shoes, or were else, for safety's sake, steel-tipped or turned up, just for the first two miles till clear of banks, as frost on thaw had glazed them pretty well, and walking warmed the blood. How well the morning 'weed' went may be fancied; how full of spirits we all felt again; and how each horse, short-held, chafed and flung his head up, snorting and curveting, so proud and prompt; and how warm were all the

greetings as we rode with those we knew and met upon the way!

The postman Munn, the little civil man; the rector's lad, who meets him for the letters; the carrier Smythe, who creeps three miles an hour; and John Gee, 'the daffy,' shambling to the doctor for more 'Mist. Pect.' for churchyard coughs and colds, with Tom, the workhouse idiot, to share load; Old Bates the hedger, with his leather gloves, having his 'bit o' bacca, sir, for hasmer;' poor Jones the stone-breaker, abusing guardians, as on his heap he hammers at their ribs, making the stones he breaks fly off and jump again.

The big-boned man, from 'the holding' by the bridge, leading his gray that has the short rat-tail; the fisherman Reub Lee, who fishes all the year, and breaks holes in the ice to put his float in—at least they say so; the poaching blacksmith, who slinks by the wood with a most suspicious lurcher at

his heels, a hare-hunter. The red-faced packman, who has chaff for girls and blarney for the women at the cottages, then county-court's them for the goods he leaves; the little widow with the old coal-cart, who says she thinks 'as how coals will be dear;' Joe with the squire's team, four sturdy bays, going into town for draining-tiles for master; and flighty Jane, who tells her woes to all, and while there is one in sight still keeps on hooting.

The one policeman, who has miles to go, and yet gets railed at if a hen is missing; and Pranx the cobbler, taking home some boots—good strong clod-hoppers, with three rows of nails, rare soil-conveyancers, no doubt, from field to field; and that little Bessie, with the gentle eyes and face so typical of innocence, to whom we have always a good word to say, when, on her way with others to the school, she looks demure and curtsies, and then smiles, as rosy

blushes, rippling up her cheeks, spread into the wavings of her soft brown hair. A pretty child with very pretty ways.

To each, and from each too, good words were passed, and for the New Year in, good wishes too.





CHAPTER II.

WINTER SCENERY—BINNS THE BASKET-MAN.

AND so the ride to cover was thoroughly enjoyed by all of us, having been, as we had been for three weeks or so, completely frost-bound ; but few of those who were then out had much faith in the weather, for the wind since overnight had slewed right round, and it now was north ; and many feared that snow was in the air, and that therefore scent was doubtful, even if hounds came.

But they did come, and they found ; but the scent was so bad, however, that the hunting came to nothing ; as Archer, who was there with Burton and the Honeybrook people, told Johnson, when he came back again next day, and explained about the

accident; and how it was that he could not get home that night, and also how lucky it was that his sister Kate and his lady-love were away—both off to Bristol together, and that his brother Edward was also out visiting some friends at Leominster, or the message that he had to send by Burton might have been thought an excuse and have frightened them. ‘Then it was altogether a wretched day?’ said Johnson, when he told him as they sat by the fire chatting in the study at the Grange.

‘Well, yes, old fellow, as to sport,’ said Archer, ‘but by no means as to country.’

‘All black and white though,’ said Johnson; ‘not much in that, John.’

‘O nonsense, Johnson,’ said Archer; ‘there is always colour for those eyes that see it. You would have seen it too,’ said he, ‘had you been there, as soon as any man.’

‘Take where we started now,’ said he;

‘the cover side. Well, even there we had it; from elms and ash and oaks, with their rusty greens and grays, and their tawny ‘keys’ and fluttering leaves of russet, against a background of old trunks and hollies and twisted boughs, and firs and blackthorn, broom and larch and furze—the winter furze that was in blossom—a likely place we all thought for a fox; and so it proved,’ said Archer. ‘We found there.

‘And round about us on the crispy turf were withered fern clumps battened by the frost, and strewn with dead leaves shining in the sun, that showed up golden browns and blacks and purples, and shades of yellow and bright bits of red on bramble sprays, over and in long drips, where snow had drifted. I saw it while the hounds were in the thicket, and thought it good. O, lots of colour, Johnson! And through the branches we could see the river that flowed below us underneath the cover, edging the

meadows with a line of light, and all the trees and woods were mirrored in it, with the reflection of the sky and willows; that also, Johnson, had some colour in it.

‘Beyond the meadows, on some rising ground,’ said Archer, ‘were some larger covers and some likely copses, sloping up steeply to a belt of woods, deep blue by distance on the dark gray hills. Those hills,’ said he, ‘we ran to; but the scent was bad, and hounds checked on the slope. Talk of no colour, Johnson! I saw lots, and all day too. They could not manage though to hit it off; so trotting on we found another fox, and messed about with him till all were tired; the scent was bad, though as the snow had come it should have mended.’

‘You had snow, then?’ said Johnson. ‘We had some here.’

‘Snow? Yes,’ said Archer; ‘and plenty of it too. I thought we should before I

started out. The sky, that was so drear all the morning, from dirty yellow changed to slaty gray, and snow came down a few flakes at a time as the hounds checked. Then quite a cloud of small stuff tossed about, and whisked unpleasantly in our eyes and ears; then large flakes slanted with a whirling drive, and the sky got cold and steely; but as the fall increased, quite white with snow. For full an hour at least,' said he, 'it came a pelter; a blinding mist for horses and for men; when just as we were thinking sport was over, and home our portion, the sky got clear again; the snow had ceased.

'It was then, old fellow,' said Archer, 'that I wished for you. Before the snow came we could see for miles along the hills and on up through the valley; but when the country was all whitened over, we saw a distance that we had not seen till then. And the valley looked much wider than before,

and all within it sharp and well defined; and pale misty forms assumed specific shapes of trees and fences, boundaries to farms, and atmospheric blues were changed to woods, low lying by the meadows. Orchards and hop-yards too, with poles all stacked, showed up distinctly, as did banks and wastes; but though above us the sky soon got light, it was darker onwards, some cold gray clouds becoming leadeny, threatening more snow. We had it too, and kindly, to go home with.'

'I should have turned for home,' said Johnson; 'and long ago.'

'Johnson, my boy, you do not understand it. What is the weather,' Archer said, 'if there is scent, or even but the veriest chance of it? With hounds in front and some old fox afoot, none think of weather or a paltry wetting! That is for babes and sucklings, and such-like, not for such hardy dogs as fox-hunters. Hunt, Johnson, hunt!'

said he; 'you will then find out about it. The grandest sport there is in all creation! And horses and hounds too, I am sure, enjoy it.'

'The fox as well?' said Johnson.

'And the fox too,' said Archer; 'for instead of being shot by rascal keepers—as he would be were it not for the hunting—all that he has to do is simply run; so that, you see, if he has any pace about him, the fact is, Johnson, he may live for years.'

'And therefore should be thankful that you hunt him?'

'Precisely. A fox has feelings, you know, the same as we have. Well, finding that the hunting was all over, Will stopped the hounds,' said Archer; 'and as he did so, flakes began to fall, and soon all round us was completely white; for what the morning left, the evening covered.'

'The furrowed fields looked flattened in their shroud, and bare-leaved trees loomed

spectral-like and large; and each branch was outlined to its smallest twig, like those trees yonder, just beyond the cedars, down by the fernery, where you caught us nicely on that warm spring day.'

'Ay, different weather then,' said Johnson, laughing. 'The blushing beauty, John, was not then caged. They are snowed-up there—at Bristol. I heard from Kate this morning.'

'And I from Jennie,' said Archer, 'who sent her love to you. Snow beautifies, as you know, Johnson, and all looked well; for every hedgerow thorn seemed decked with lace; and leaves—dead leaves, that blew about upon the turf—had all their reds and russets sparkled over; and even ugly trees looked picturesque, so altered were they by the snow then on them. Plain roofs showed angles from projecting tiles; flat sheds looked ridged from overhanging boards; and wood-piles, that we had never

noticed as we passed, looked now well worth the sketching.

‘You know that shedding, Johnson, in the park,’ said he, ‘for sheltering cattle—we came by Uplands and so down the banks—that you once thought so poor, you would not sketch it? Well, that in its new dress was a bit of colour. I will give it you,’ said Archer. ‘If you have a fancy snow scene, stick it in it.’

‘The long low roof was mellowy-white and gray, with ragged edging and with darkened eaves; the uprights faced with snow, and rough and rugged, and fronting neutral tints and shades of madder; with dark lines marking out the rack and rafters—a backing, as I saw it, to some Scotch cattle that were lying there, with shaggy coats of purply-black and red, in straw, well bedded.’

‘Behind the shed, that oak—you noticed it—a lightning-withered one, that looked

so weird-like as the sun went down that evening we were there, stretched its bare arms across the three old yews, and threw forked shadows down upon the shed, that broke the breadth of white. The sides of it I daresay you remember? High gorse and fern clumps, and a curve of rails — knotted, unbarked, and broken. These were full of good colour too, Johnson, being whitened but in parts.

‘So also was that stone trough by the brambles, that fills, they say, night and day from a spring above it, that oozes out of the turf, and running down the hill, makes the brook at the bottom, that miles on becomes a wide stream, that joins with the river, and so runs to the sea. And so again,’ said he, ‘were some figures to one side of it—capital colour, and just where you would have placed them, Johnson—two women turnip-cutting, who, with their heaps, made harmonising tints, and shadows that were

needed there to blot the white. And just as we moved away, the red sun, that was sinking below the hills, threw a last gleam upon the ground in the front of us — a lengthy primrose patch — that made more blue the shadows on the snow, and toned the lot. It would come well, I think, in a circular picture,’ said Archer.

‘I think, John, you have sketching on the brain,’ said Johnson. ‘Your symptoms strengthen. It is a bad case, I fear.’

‘Well, perhaps I have,’ said Archer; ‘but such effects as I see when with hounds are more than you will see in miles of wanderings. I have often come upon such jolly bits,’ said he, ‘that, spite of pace and fondness for the sport, I have longed to stop and sketch them.’

‘Your mental “memos” ought to save that trouble. They are strong enough,’ said Johnson.

‘Hunt, my good fellow,’ replied Archer;

‘you will not repent it. It is good on all scores.’

‘I know it is,’ said Johnson. ‘And as Kate is fond of riding, perhaps I may—that is, to see them meet. I could not hunt.’

‘Bother!’ said Archer; ‘you can stick a horse. I’ll be your guardian.’

‘Andrews, you say, is better, John?’ said Johnson. ‘Was his horse hurt much?’

‘No,’ was the reply; ‘he is stiffish, but not hurt; though I never saw a fellow get it kinder than Ted had it. I heard his head bump,’ said Archer; ‘but I did not see it, though I was riding with him. His crushed hat saved him.’

‘Where was it that it happened?’

‘This side the turnpike. Charlie and I,’ said he, ‘had just turned off the road to miss the ice, when Teddy, I suppose, came straight upon it. However, he was down; and there he lay stunned, and with his cheek gashed. So while I saw to him,

Charlie got a car from the inn on the hill; and so we then put him in it and brought him to the Fox. We both rode by him, and I,' said Archer, 'led his horse.

'Well, when we got there he was very queer, so we got him to bed at once; and when the doctor came, he said we must not move him, until he saw this morning how he was. So as I thought we ought to stay with him, one or both of us,' said Archer, 'I said that I would do so, if Charlie would ride round or send on here, to save the servants sitting up for me. O, he will do now,' said he, 'right enough. He will have a mark though!'

'Did he ride back?' said Johnson.

'Not exactly,' said Archer; 'not quite up to that, old man, though he is better. No, I put him, in a car, and rode with him as far as the suburbs; and then, as I found he bore the shake of it all right, I left him, and walked back to the Fox. One of their

men was going to take the horse home. I have sent Gibbes on the brown horse to Honeybrook, to know how he got there and how he is. I shall ride across there myself,' said Archer, 'to-morrow.

'I saw a good bit,' continued Archer, 'as I came back over the bridge, Johnson, that would come well in a picture. The swans were there—you know those jolly swans?—sailing amongst the boats, and making colour on the reflections of the painted barges, as, darting flashes of the purest white, they dipped their yellow beaks to catch the crumbs lads with red comforters were throwing to them. Steel tint was round them, from the water there; and a drift of packed ice, lodged against the bridge, gave whitish greens, that told against the stone-tints of the buttress, and varied form.

'And on the other side—the right-hand side as you come from the country—as I

looked over, was another bit,' said Archer; 'and not a bad one. Beside the towing-path and by the quay, where red and white wide patches in the water marked well the form of every building there, were hay-boats loading, and some "bold bargees" assisting brawny navvies with some stone, rough-hewn in blocks, and ready to be shipped; the figures grouping fairly with the boats, and full of colour.'

'Yes, I should think it came well,' Johnson said.

'And at the curve beyond were moving shadows, on the leaden reflex of the sky above, of schoolboys playing, under the crumbling stone wall by the steps, beneath the garden of the Deanery; that ivy-mantled place,' said he, 'green all the year, that makes so marked a feature from the bridge, and which you must have noticed as you passed.'

'Yes, frequently,' said Johnson; 'and

mooned about those steps, and sketched the broken stonework and the ivy, that comes so well there up beyond the archway, where you look all up the river to the bridge under the tower of the old cathedral.'

'Which I saw, Johnson, splendidly,' said Archer, 'last night at dusk, while lolling on the bridge there for a smoke. I strolled down there while Teddy went to sleep. I never saw it better. It looked so high and massive above the trees upon the college green; and in the twilight, dark against the sky, it seemed of one tint, a deep and purple red, with all its fretwork faintly traced in white, and each niche and canopy marked out with snow.'

'And far beyond it, down the river, Johnson, were whitened fields and trees, and distant hills; against a sky that well-nigh had been black, but for a flight of pigeons wheeling homewards, and for the first flakes of some coming snow that, fall-

ing, dimmed it. One broad brown sail, that showed beyond the bend, broke the long level of the river-side, and figures at the turn gave fitting colour. A really good bit, so I thought,' said Archer.

'Hark!' said he; 'there is Bobby. Gibbes is back.'

'Yes,' Johnson said, 'it must have been. The view is very fine too there at flood time. You see so far, and get a breadth of white.'

'Too great a breadth of it sometimes,' said Archer.

'Please, sir,' said the servant, as she tapped at the door and brought in her message, 'Gibbes is back; and the master's compliments and he's better, sir.'

'O, very well, Mary,' said Archer.

'And please, sir,' said she, 'here's old Binns the basket-man come, and I was to give that brief to you, sir; and he said he'd wait, please, sir, while you looked at it'

‘Tell him to sit down then, and let him have something,’ said Archer.

‘Brief?’ said Johnson.

‘Petition,’ replied Archer; ‘the people round here call them “briefs.”’ So Johnson laughed. ‘Ah, I see,’ said Archer, looking at it. ‘It is for his son. Shall we go and have a talk with him?’

‘If you like,’ said Johnson. So they went.

‘This is for your son, I see, Binns; what, is he crippled?’ said Archer, as they went into the kitchen.

‘Is, sir,’ said the man; ‘gun busted, an’ blowed two o’ his fingers off, sir; an’ as it hinders his work i’ the filds, we was a-tryin’ to rise him a hos, sir, to do a bit o’ carryin’; so we be a-gettin’ the gentlefolks to put their names down, sir. ‘It were last summer, sir, in Maay, an’ he anna done much since, sir. We was out wi’ the team plough-in’ for swedes, sir; and the women was down i’ the hop-yard a rush-tyin’; when

“Dick lad,” says the mayster, “take the gun, boy, and frighten them birds there; them beggarin’ tom-tits beat the marrer-fatsagin.” So he did, sir, an’ it busted, for the charge he put in—so the mayster said, sir—were too big.

‘But theer,’ said Binns decisively, ‘he were a fool for gwain, sir; as he might ha’ knowd it warn’t safe, an’ that summut ood appen. For you see, sir, the fool of a lad, though he be my son, the eldest o’ seven, sir—twenty-two next August—an’ four on ’em dead, ony that mornin’, sir, passed cock-eyed Jane wi’out spakin’ to her.’

‘What had that got to do with it?’ said Johnson.

‘Bad luck, sir,’ said Binns, ‘not to be civil to a ooman as squints, that be it, sir; an’ as if that warn’t enough, sir, he must goo, as he comed into the fold-yard, an’ walk under the lather, sir, as were agin the tallet! Well, that settled it; so his two fingers was

blowed clean off! All fixed though, sir, afore he took the gun; the charge didna matter, though the mayster said so.'

'I see,' said Archer; 'it was his "fate"?'

'It were, sir,' said the man, 'through the squint, an' not bein' civil to it. Now I knows better,' said he; 'but theer, I had some schoolin', I did, and he daynt. I couldna afford the hapence for him, sir; so I oona blame him or be hard on him, poor soul, for I were taught them things, an' tould o' the risk on 'em; an' if ivir I killed a ladycow, or saw the fust lamb wi' its taayl to ma, as somethin' ood appen; an' I must moind an' not sow anythin' that day, as it oodna come up, sir. Good Fridy's the day for that, sir. Anythin' you sow then, sir, 'll goo loike woildfire; an' as for stocks, if you plants 'em that evenin', when the sun goes down, they'll all on 'em come up double uns! An' buns an' bread, sir, baked o' that day'll niver get mowldy.'

‘If you baked for the year, then, you would be all right?’ said Johnson.

‘Is, sir, we should, ony we couldna git the flour, sir; or else that’s what old Pigeon teld ma.’

‘And who is old Pigeon?’ said Archer.

‘Law, sir,’ said the man, ‘an’ don’t you know old Pigeon, sir? Why, he be the man as keeps the cyder shop, and sells it good too, sir.’

‘He sells good cider, does he?’ said Archer. ‘Not too much of the brook-apple in it, I suppose, then, eh, Binns?’

‘I dunna kneow disacly, sir, about that theer,’ said Binns. ‘But it’s goodish—not so good as this o’ yourn though, sir—your health, gentlemen both. Well, sir, old Pigeon;—we calls him that for shortlike, but John Pie’s his name, sir—(Higgs be his real un), pie John—Pigeon, sir, ’ecos he used to ring “the pye bell” o’ Christmas-day arter service, to hurry ’em on home for the mince-

pies an' the puddin', sir, an' gladden theer hearts a' what was a-comin' for 'em; an' "the pancake bell" too, sir, o' Shrove Toosdy, he rung that un.

'Well, his mother, sir—she believed in things she did, sir. You know old Pie an' I was great friends, sir,' said Binns; 'so when he went, like a dootiful son as he were, to see his old mother o' Motherin' Sundy—'ecos he were partial to a line o' weal, sir, an' he knowd as she'd have it, sir, as were her custom—he took ma ooth 'im; when darn ma boddy, sir, if a little bit o' a chit as they had fro' the warkus, if she didna goo an' drap the weal—an' a beautiful line it were, sir, wi' kidney-fat an' all to it, sir—flop o' the flure, through a-starin' at ma, sir; as were then good-lookin', bein' a young un, sir, an' not the feyther o' no family, as I be now, sir.'

'Ah, you see what it is to have good-looks,' said Archer.

"O, you hussey!" says the ooman; "you

done it now, you have,”’ continued Binns; “you should ha’ got the chaps to ha’ ‘haaved’ you o’ Aaster Mondy, an’ then it oodna ha’ happened.” The men haaves the women o’ the Mondy, sir,’ said he, ‘an’ the women returns the compliment o’ the Toosdy, sir, an’ wishes they’d got both days to do it in. “Haave the women an’ save the crocks,” says she, sir. “You’ll never have a breakage all the year then, if you haaves the girl.” So we all laughed, sir,’ said Binns; ‘but hur said it were true.’

‘You don’t believe in old sayings, then?’ said Archer.

‘Some on ’em, sir,’ said Binns, ‘’ccos I knows they be true. It be a great country for sayins, sir. Now about apples an’ blossoms, sir; if they hangs o’ the trees together, ther’ll be a death i’ the family; or if you finds a white bane i’ the garding. I’ve proved ’em, so I knows ’em; an’ snowdrops, sir, theer you be agin; for at our mayster’s

somebody brought some on 'em into the house one toime, sir, an' we niver had no gulls, not all that year, sir, as were a great loss; an' all through them simple flowers, as you oodna think, sir, ood goo for to do sich a thing. That were the year my sister Liza had the twins, though that 'were the nuts, sir, that were,' said Binns; 'so many double uns about.'

And Johnson and Archer both laughed heartily.

'O, it were the truth, gentlemen,' said he; 'they be alleys reckoned "bad for women, but good for lambs;" they brings the "double couples," sir.'

'What, four?' said Archer; 'four lambs and four children?'

'No, sir,' said he; 'two of a sort, sir, two twins an' a "double couple."''

'Well, then, that is four,' said Archer; 'four lambs and four youngsters. They should put the one against the other, Binns.'

‘So they should, sir,’ said he; ‘but they don’t “sort” right, somehow. The farmers as hasn’t got no children, or leastways can afford to be keepin’ on ’em, they sides the nuts wi’ the sheep, so gets the lambs; an’ we as wants the lambs has the twins. That be why I don’t hold good wi’ nuts, sir.’

‘Then you have had twins yourself?’ said Johnson.

‘Is, sir,’ said Binns promptly, ‘I has, twice over, sir—that be four on ’em at two times,’ said he; ‘as ood a bin too much for ma, leastways my woife, if they hadna gone back,’ said he.

‘Gone back?’ said Johnson.

‘Is, sir,’ said he; ‘they went dead; an’ it were a year o’ double uns both times; the coppies were full on ’em, sir.’

‘What do they put crape on the bee-hives for, Binns?’ said Archer. ‘We saw some, if you remember, Johnson, in the summer, by those cottages in the valley.’

‘I remember it,’ said Johnson. ‘We stayed to look at them.’

‘Crape, sir?’ said Binns. ‘I daresay that were at Miller’s, the thatcher’s, sir; him as died o’ the rheumatics, sir, ’ecos he oodna keep a bit o’ alder i’ his weskit-pockit, as ood a cured him; but he daynt believe in it, an’ so he went dead. Well, sir,’ said he, ‘when the man dies, the ooman puts the crape o’ the hives, sir, and taps ’em wi’ the door-kay, to keep the bees fro’ strayin’; an’ when they starts with the corpse, sir, they turns the hives roun’—that maakes ’em saafe, sir, for that a-year. They oona goo then.’

‘And do you believe in that, my man?’ said Johnson.

‘Is I does, sir,’ said Binns; ‘an’ about the quarrelling. If the man an’ ooman gets a-wranglin’, spoiteful-loike, the bees ’ll goo. O, it be true, sir,’ said the man, seeing that Johnson was incredulous, ‘’ecos Smith and his ooman, as were alleys a-foightin’, niver

couldna keep no bees. They oodna ha' it, sir; they loikes pace an' quietness, they does.'

'Then how do you account for the "tanking" that entices them back again?' said Archer.

'Same waay, sir,' said Binns—'to stop the nise. They thinks, "Let's goo back, bees, an' stop that row with the kay an' the fry-in'-pan;" so they does goo back, sir, an' then it stops, an' so they stop. That's how it be, sir. Theer be lots o' bees in our parish, sir.'

'You must be a good-tempered lot, then,' said Johnson.

'We be, sir,' said Binns; 'leastways theer ain't nobody not worth quarrelling wi', 'ecos, you see, sir, ourn be the littlest parish theer be—ony forty-one on us a' together, an' two babbies.'

'A "double couple"?' suggested Archer.

'An' that includes, sir,' continued Binns, 'the parson an' his lot, an' the lot at the Coort House; an' theer be ony them two

houses an' the five cottages—that bit o' a row, sir, by the pound, wheer the lads plays church-while, an' the cyder-shop, sir, as I spoke on—old Pigeon's.'

'Well, drink your cider, Binns,' said Archer. 'We must not keep you; the night draws in apace.'

'O, thank you, sir; don't let ma hurry you,' said Binns. 'I can maake maself werry coomfortable, sir, wi' a drap o' cyder—it be oncommon good cyder, sir, too, oncommon good—an' I can find ma waay, sir, if it be iver so laate; so dunna let ma put you about, sir; Ise stop wi' pleasure.'

'Well,' Archer said, 'I will put my name down, Binns, for a pound, and I will leave the money with your wife as I ride by to-morrow.'

'Better gie it to ma maself,' said Binns, 'an' much obleeged to you, sir, 'ecos the ooman maybe ma be carless on it, an' lose it, sir; as ood be a sad thing.'

‘Yes, it would,’ said Archer; ‘or if you dropped it in the cider-shop.’

‘O, honour bright, sir; now you oodna think I ood goo for to do sich a thing, sir, ood you?’ said he. ‘No, sir, this—least-ways just the littlest drop more, if I ma be so bould, sir, ool be quite enough for ma, sir, an’ thank you, sir.’

‘Well, if you won’t call at the cider-shop, then, Binns, you shall have another cupful, but no more, mind. Just fill it for him, Mary,’ said Archer. ‘It is as much as will do you good, Binns; and don’t stay, now, but get back home to your wife, and tell her I will give her the money to-morrow.’

‘I ool, sir, and thank you koindly, sir; your good health agin, gentlemen both,’ said Binns.

‘What fishes these fellows are at “cyder,” as they call it!’ said Johnson, as they went back to the study.

‘Yes,’ said Archer; ‘they are; and yet it seldom touches them or hurts them.’

‘Too used to it, I suppose,’ said Johnson; ‘as they pay wages in part with it But it cannot be strong?’

‘O, no,’ said Archer; ‘or there would be no work in them.’

‘No wonder, then, when that fellow gets a drop of good, he should want to hang at it. He will stand a hint,’ said Johnson.

‘And must take it too,’ said Archer, ‘or I shall start him.’

‘What a county it is for sayings, John!’

‘If you heard them all,’ said Archer, ‘you would say so. In sayings, proverbs, old customs, and superstitions, they beat all people I ever came near.’

‘From what I have heard since I have been in the county, I should think they do,’ said Johnson. ‘Are they a sober lot?’ said he.

‘Yes, very sober as a rule,’ said Archer,
‘and all good-hearted. I don’t know any
district where you would mend them.’

‘That’s right, then,’ said Johnson.





CHAPTER III.

TWILIGHT MUSINGS—WARNE THE HUNTSMAN.

‘ FOR we care not for falls, as we heed not hard knocks,
So we can but be in at the death of the fox !

The death of the fox, the death of the fox,
So we can but be in at the death of the fox !

It looks like “ the death of the fox,” does it not?” said Burton, as Johnson and Archer were busy painting ; and he ceased to drum on the window-panes of the studio, where it faced to the garden and the fields, that, adjoining the Elm-tree-walk, made such a welcome bit of greenery at other times for those who were strolling there.

For the long avenue was one of the favourite walks of the townspeople, as they always got such a nice breeze in it ; and it was shady and cool in the summer ; and it had plenty of flickering lights and soft

shadows about it, and lots of rustle, up in the old elm-boughs, when the wind blew through them, and sent their thin green leaves shimmering to the seats that were under them.

And when Johnson used of a summer evening to sit at the window there, that fronted to the walk, and look down over his bright fringe of flowers, and listen to the band, as all sorts of pretty costumes flitted beneath him, and made nice colours amongst the trees, even he could not help acknowledging—wedded as he was to the country—that, ‘for town,’ it was certainly good.

It was good too when the band had gone, and the pretty muslins—the blues and the whites, and the lavender-grays and the lilacs—had departed; and the old Elm-walk had become ‘a lovers’ walk.’ For then, when it had dusked over and the greens were purples, and the bright stars

peeped through them, he could hear in the stillness the sweet chimes of the cathedral, and the striking of the quarters and the hours by the great clock there; that—for the same hands made them—would make him fancy it was ‘Big Ben,’ away at Westminster, and waft his thoughts to those summer evenings, years ago, when—living near there, before he went to Bayswater, and before he knew Archer—he used to spend many an hour in St. James’s Park, and over a quiet pipe on his favourite seat there, as the last gleam reddened the water, look into the future, and picture to himself the happiness of those—many of whom he would see go by him—who seemed to have some fair face to look upon, some fair form to love and think about.

And that same thought, as he sat at the window in the avenue, and caught the whisperings of the leaves and the low murmur of those who were beneath them, would call

up other thoughts, not of the busy hum of the Great City, but thoughts pertaining to the country; to the quiet and the beauty and the peacefulness of 'home'—for there seemed now a lasting sound in the word—and to that settled-down feel that he was beginning to have when he thought of the home that was near to it—near to his own home, the Rosary; for it was there, at Grantley, that, in the person of Miss Archer of the Grange, he had at length found his ideal; his complete ideal of face and figure, and of all those womanly attributes that he used to hope he should find in the one he loved—if ever indeed he did love.

But as his love for Miss Kate Archer was a sincere and settled affection, and he now knew that it was not in vain that he did love her—for too 'real' herself to play the coquette, or to trifle with him, she, as she liked him, clearly reciprocated it—his thoughts, when they thus turned to the

Grange, were pleasant ones; and they contrasted pleasingly with the old thoughts of former days, when the like sounds that came to him on those evenings from the cathedral came to him then from the Clock Tower, and when all he could at that time look forward to was 'single blessedness.'

So that though his thoughts did sometimes, when he was in town at his studio, and listening to the chimes, wander away to the old associations of former days, they travelled in a circle, and ended at the Grange.

And it made work go well with him, when he did work; for he felt he had now something more to live for, and, as he trusted, a great deal of happiness to look forward to; for if all went well with him, he hoped, when the June roses filled the air with their fragrance, that his 'dear Katie' would be Miss Archer no longer, but his own rose at the Rosary.

But pretty as was the Elm-tree-walk in the summer, when the band and the muslins were there, it looked well even in the winter.

For the old trees, that were so fine, bared their branches to the sky, and showed a white front to the gray of it; and their sprays were as fretwork against it. And though the sunset effects there had vanished—their purples, their greens, and their browns—the round red sun would light up the trees gloriously, and throw a glow on the snow in the road, and bright gleams on the walls of the gardens, where the ivy was white-topped and heavy. But on this winterly morning, when, as February came in, the snow fell fast, the avenue was deserted; for the flakes came down steadily, hiding the outlines of the trees, and making a mistiness of all that was beyond them.

So Burton, tired of looking into the fields, and watching the robins that were

hopping about on the white walks below him, and shaking the snow from the bushes in the borders, turned from the window, and said,

‘Confound the weather! It keeps coming down as if it had not snowed for a month, instead of our having been snowed-up; and we are yet barely into February! That mare of mine, Johnson, is eating her head off in the stable; and with ice still an inch thick on the pools, I see but very little chance at present of our getting any hunting for a month or more. Well, it is an early “stopper” this time, any way. Six weeks actually since the first flake, three weeks without a meet, and one’s horse since that “Prescott” day not out half a dozen times altogether. Confound it all!’ said Charlie.

‘Don’t be savage, man,’ said Johnson, ‘but stick those hounds up, will you? and while we are waiting, I will put some

touches in. It snows so fast, I don't expect he'll come.'

'O, he will come,' said Charlie, 'right enough. He is used to weather, Johnson.'

The one for whom they waited was 'old Will'—Will Warne the huntsman; whose likeness Johnson had promised he would paint, to give the wife; Archer to frame it, and to help him with it. And Warden and Charlie Burton had 'gone shares' in a wonderful teapot for the old woman, and tea enough with it, 'with a pinch o' green in it, please, gentlemen,' to last her for a twelvemonth—'she is a rare woman for her tea,' said Will—as some return for house-room and civility.

For when they had been up at the Kennels with Johnson, or with Archer, who used also to go and sketch there, and leave his canvas with her, or by themselves, or with some of their town friends, to see the hounds out, or fed, or the horses in the

stables, the old lady used to do all she could to make them comfortable, 'just in her plain way,' as she said.

In the hunting-field Warne passed muster fairly, as he was a well-behaved man and always civil, though he had at times a good deal there to try him; through people who would persist in coming out, though they rode in fear, and had to put a guard on themselves to avoid calling hounds 'dogs,' and who therefore, having nothing sportsman-like in their nature, knew not what to do, or what they should avoid; consequently they were always in the way of hounds, huntsman, and horsemen; a nuisance to all, and so they found favour with none.

But at home Warne was 'a character'; and hence, as Burton and Warden always lodged near the Kennels when they were in town, they frequently called there for early information as to fixtures, or whatever else sufficed for an excuse, so that they might

have a gossip with him about hounds and hunting, as he was a very decent fellow in his way, and had sense enough to be always servant-like and civil; and though he was made much of by the members of the Hunt, who liked the man, he was never familiar.

The promise for the likeness was an old one; but the sitting for it had been let stand over till they were 'blocked by frost;' when, as he said, 'he and they would then have more time' for hounds and canvas. But though the weather had for some time 'blocked' him, no progress had been made, as Johnson and Archer had been in the country, interchanging visits at the Grange and the Rosary; where, as Miss Kate Archer was at home, and Miss Clare was spending the Christmas with Miss Johnson, she having returned with her from Bristol, Archer and Johnson were in a considerable state of happiness; and they had

only recently, on the departure of their respective lady-loves—Kate going back with Jennie—returned to town; at least to stay there.

The hounds, however, were already sketched, as they had been taken at odd times at the Kennels; ‘rubbed-in’ by Archer, and finished by Johnson; as well as some of the Hunt horses, and the gray, that they wanted for a future picture that they thought of, of ‘Hounds at Cover-side’—a joint picture, if it ever was painted—for Suffolk-street.

As Warne’s idea for the present picture, however, was ‘the best hounds by him,’ they managed, when painting the other hounds, to group together four of the leading ones, namely, Rambler, Warrior, Dauntless, and old Hector; and those were the hounds depicted on the canvas, that Johnson asked for, and that was now placed by Burton upon the easel.

‘How shall we pose him, Charlie?’ said Johnson, as he strengthened the light a bit on Rambler’s nose. ‘What do you say about it, Archie?’

‘I think,’ was Charlie’s answer, ‘as he said, “a-sitting and enjoying of his pipe.”’

‘If you can turn him, I should take him standing, certainly,’ said Archer, turning to Johnson with uplifted brush, ‘alongside this old gray; with horn in hand, and with his hounds about him. I think they would come in well as we have grouped them. The horse,’ said Archer, ‘I would paint myself, as in this study, Johnson, if you can change his whim.’

‘It is of no use,’ Johnson said, ‘for I asked him, and he will have it so; as his old woman thinks “’twill look so like him!” If he should come, John, draw him out a bit on hounds and horses, just to light him up. He has a rare good head, if I can hit it.’

‘He has,’ said Archer; ‘and seeing that he is sixty six or seven, it is wonderful that he rides as he does; but he has famous hands, and good nerve; and his heart’s with his hounds.’

‘Young man,’ cried Johnson to Burton, ‘just elevate yourself, will you? Rise in the world, and see if he is coming.’

So Charlie, who had strolled across to the corner of the room to where there were some canvases, and who was just reeving his nose critically at a study of a fox he had found there, got up aloft, and looked into the end of the avenue—over the stopped-up panes that gave the top light there; but no Will could be seen—nothing but a white world, and snow falling fast, down through the network of the old elm-trees.

‘Confound it, Johnson!’ said Charlie, as he stepped down from the window, with a shake that sent a ‘blob’ on to the gray’s mane, and caused an exclamation from

Archer; 'where is the coffee-pot? Let us have a brew! I want some coffee, for out of doors,' said he, 'it is most wretched. Light up, will you?' said he to the fire, as he poked it. 'O, for a burst with hounds! I'll fill my pipe.

'The death of the fox, the death of the fox;
So we can but be in at the death of the fox!

Then tap goes a hurdle, and crack go the sticks,
As under the orchards we ride for the ricks;
And we swing over one hedge, drop into another—'

'Now do, if you please, be a man and a brother, and consider my nerves; and cease that venerable ditty,' said Johnson, 'or how am I to work?'

'Keep the chorus, Charlie,' cried Archer; 'but fresh words would be acceptable.'

'All right,' was the response, 'you unappreciative individual; but wait till our Hunt-dinner, my boy, and I will give you,' said Charlie, 'a new song to an old tune, a regular House that Jack built, and bring you

all in, every man of you. Come now, Johnson,' said he, 'be generous; and brew, old boy, when you have finished prodging at those hounds with that stiff hog-hair of yours. Just look at his brushes, Archie—enough to set up shop with! What do you keep them in that beastly state for, Johnson? And look at his palette, layer upon layer; never been cleaned for a twelve-month, I'll be bound.'

'Brew for yourself,' said Johnson, 'you lazy piece of goods; you are doing nothing!'

'There, then, is Will the huntsman,' said Charlie, putting down the coffee-pot. 'I know his knock.'

'Good-morning, gentlemen,' said that individual, as he made his appearance on the door-mat, his face quite rosy and his coat quite white. 'I'll just shake the snow off here a bit before I come in, so as not to mess the room like. There's a deal o' weather out o' doors to-day—a deal o'

weather!' And shaking his coat, to Archer's horror, lest he should sprinkle the sky he was putting in behind the gray, Warne entered.

'I'm rather late, Mr. Johnson and gentlemen,' said he; 'but I had a check at the start, as the Master brought a friend to see the hounds, so I had to cast back a bit; and when I did hit on again, the snow so balled my feet, the pace was slow.'

'Never mind, old gentleman,' said Archer; 'we have you now. What will you have, Warne? What can we find him, Johnson?'

'I am afraid,' was the reply, 'there is nothing but ale. We are cider men at home, Warne,' said Johnson, 'and have to put up with ale here; but if there is anything else you would prefer to it, we will send out for it with pleasure for you.'

'Not for me, thank you, sir,' said Will.

'Well, then, ask the old woman, Charlie, for a bit of ginger and some sugar, and

warm it up for him; there is some bottled Scotch in the cupboard, you'll find; it will keep the cold out. Well, now then,' said Johnson, 'what about this pipe business, Warne? Do you know, I really think you should change your mind. I certainly don't like the look of it myself; and as Mr. Archer here says, you would look so much better with your hounds and your horse. Come now, what say you: shall we have it that way?'

'Well, sir, I should like it that way myself, sir, certainly,' said Will, 'there's no denyin' of it; but then, you see, sir, it's for the woman; and "William," says she—my old woman, I mean, sir, as you see up at the Kennels; I married her, sir, a matter o' six-and-thirty year ago, when I were First Whip and she were the dairy girl—"William," says she, "when they paints you, have your pipe, and be a-smokin' of it; it'll seem natteraler and more nicer-like." You'll

excuse her, sir, but she ain't a eddicated woman, as you can hear, sir; her parents never brought her up properly, poor soul!—no blame to her though, gentlemen.'

'None whatever, Warne,' said Johnson.

"For though I says it," says she,' continued Will, "'you smokes a pipe so nice, it do become you. I likes to look at you when you're a-smokin'. And don't you be drawd a-hootin', William—they alleys puts 'em that way when they paints 'em; a-ridin' down a wood, and off their heads, with hounds along of 'em—because, you know, I can't abear a noise; and if I saw you screechin' there for life, like when you're with the Master—then you must—I'm certain I should turn you to the wall; so don't you do it. Be peaceable," says she; "and if you get your pipe, you'll think o' nothin.'"

'You like your pipe, then?' said Johnson.

'I do, sir,' said Will. 'I took to it first

sir, for the toothache, and it's been a great comfort to me ever since.'

'So now you smoke from habit?' said Archer.

'Well, maybe, sir,' said Will; 'but p'raps it is because I likes it. It's sort o' company, you see, sir, and keeps me home o' nights, because I have it comfortable along with the woman, instead o' going into public-houses, as I were never given to, nor any of my family, gentlemen, though I likes a drop o' good ale at home all the same, sir, as it seems to comfort my innards.'

'Ay,' said Charlie, 'the "innards" are important parts, Warne; that's why I take a drop of it myself occasionally.'

'Yes,' said Archer; 'but you know when to stop, old fellow.'

'I should hope I do,' said Charlie.

'Then about this pipe,' said Johnson; 'are we settled on that point?'

'Well, I think, gentlemen,' replied Will,

‘and you, Mr. Johnson, if you’ll allow me, I’ll be took that way, just to please the woman, doing of a gentle clay, and Hector by me, along o’ Rambler and Warrior and Dauntless, just as you’ve got ’em there, a-lookin’ up, you know, while I’m a-thinkin’, “You blessed hounds, we’ll have a fox to-morrow.”

‘You see, sir, Hector, he knows; he judges by my face; the others guesses; so please give him the best of it—by token he’s a head! Yes, Hector’s got a head.

‘Thank you, Mr. Burton,’ said Will, as Charlie, having brewed, handed the ale to him. ‘I looks towards you, gentlemen, and I drinks your healths. “Gentlemen all,” ’ said Will.

‘Thanks, Warne,’ said they.

‘How is it? To your taste, old gentleman?’ said Archer.

‘Right to a T, sir; thank you all the same. Now then, sir,’ said Will to Johnson,

‘when you’re ready, I’ll begin. I never cares to wait too long by cover. You’d like a tidy lot o’ smoke, I s’pose, to show the pipe’s a good un, and he draws well? How will you have me hold him?’

‘O, as you always do,’ said Johnson; ‘but don’t you really think now, Warne, as you have hounds round you, that you should be taken in the open?—say standing by the gray, and horn in hand. Mr. Archer has a capital likeness here of the old horse.’

‘So he has, sir, and much obliged I am to him, sir, for takin’ of it; but as I said, sir, it’s for the woman. But it’ll be quite natural, sir, all the same,’ said Will, ‘if I am a-smokin’, sir, because I often have ’em in the bower, and in the chimney-corner, all of ’em—that is, by turns; ’bout three or four of ’em at a time, sir; to incense ’em into things a bit, and make ’em sensible. Hector’s the one for that; he’s sensible, if you like, sir. Why, when we’re a-drawing—

you've seen him, Mr. Archer?—if he comes out o' cover, it's all over. The rest draw on to keep "the field" from grumblin', but the Master and me knows there's no fox there.

'Why, bless you, gentlemen,' said Will, 'that hound, he knows! If Mr. Fox is there, he'll walk straight to him, and look him in the face; as much as to say, "Now it's no manner o' use your hangin' here, you old beggar, so out you go; or else I'll have your brush, or 'bay' for Master." He don't mind just givin' him a start for the sake of sport, sir; but when old fox is off, then,' said Will, 'don't he "bay," gentlemen!

'You don't know that dog language, sir, perhaps?' said Will to Johnson, knowing he was not a hunting-man. 'It means, "Wake up, will you, there, you lazy hounds, for I'm a-goin'; so if you're fond o' fox, come on a bit." That quickens Mr. Fox, and brings the hounds; who open too, because they all

know Hector; and they know they can trust him. His judgment's perfect.

‘A rare good hound is Hector! To see him come out when there's no fox; and stand there whiskin' that old starn of his—he's a fine starn, sir—till all the others come; a-thinkin' to hisself, “You innocent young pups, though I know all about it, you don't;” and when they do come, to see the looks he gives 'em—it's like a picture! He pities 'em, sir; he pities 'em!

‘But it's much the same with hounds as 'tis with humans, so I take it, sir,’ said Will; ‘we ar'n't all worthy to be tarred with the same brush; we ar'n't all got the same knowledge. 'Cause why, sir? If we had, ther'd be no court-cards in the pack; they'd be all pips alike—not a ace o' trumps among 'em! Now I call Sir Charles a trump,’ said he, ‘beggin' his pardon for bein' so bold as to say so; because it ar'n't every mother's son as can hunt a pack like he can, though a

many young bloods as comes out think they can; and a great deal better too, if they had but the handlin' of 'em.

'But that's ignorance, Mr. Johnson; ignorance and vanity,' said Will; 'the two things as alleys shows a man up. They've vanity enough to think it, and ignorance enough to fancy others ar'n't a-laughin' at 'em. A deal o' both in this world, sir, a deal of it.'

'No doubt you are right, quite right, Warne. A little this way, please, the head half turned. Yes, that will do,' said Johnson, 'very nicely. We have a sketch of the bower, just the shape of it, Warne, and the table in it, as your wife said something about it; and we think of putting Hector on your right, and your hand upon him, as he is looking up; and Warrior by him, with his nose upon your left knee, scrooging in to get his share of notice; Rambler in the

front, standing up, as if waiting his turn to be talked to; and Dauntless lying down, just by your feet. Now overhead,' said Johnson, 'what have we got for that? What comes there?'

'Well, honeysuckles, sir,' said Will, 'is what grows there; the woman likes the smell of 'em; and up the sides is ivy, and at the back, sir; that with the large dark leaves, sir, like 'gainst the Lodge.'

'O yes,' said Johnson; 'I remember now. Rough sketch that, will you, Archie?—depth of rich green behind, light green above; the figures in half shadow, gleam in front—and then come here. I think some such arrangement perhaps might do?'

'I'll try it,' Archer said.

'You won't forget a somethin' on the table—the block there in the middle—will you, sir? or those as see it won't believe it's me; by token of a dry pipe, don't you see!'

‘What do you want there, Warne? What do you fancy most?’ said Johnson.

‘Well, if it’s mornin’ part, p’raps put it ale; a big brown jug, sir, please; but if it’s evenin’, might be somethin’ short.’

‘The brown jug, Warne, will look best.’

‘We’ll say that then, sir, please.’

‘There, Warne,’ said Johnson, after Will had been posed some time. ‘Now rest a bit, for sitting long is tiring. Pour out the coffee, Charlie, if it’s ready—cups round.’

‘That’s what I tells the woman, sir,’ said Will, ‘but she won’t have it. She says it’s “fidgets.” But I always did like to be on the move, sir. It’s very healthy, sir, and stirs the blood; don’t allow the innards to get cold!’

‘No, that’s important, Warne. Come, are you taking care of yourself?’ said Johnson.

‘Very much, sir, I’m doin’ of it, thank you. I knew a man as once died, sir, o’ them cold innards!’

‘Ah, they are no doubt bad things,’ said Johnson; ‘but if you stick to something “short,” as you call it, I don’t think you will have any “innards” long to take care of, Warne,’ said he. ‘Spirits are vile things!’

‘Now are they, sir?’ said Will with astonishment; ‘I shouldn’t ha’ thought it! They don’t taste amiss, sir, just now and then, you know, sir, as a sort of a nightcap.’

‘Villanous!’ said Johnson, who was very temperate. ‘Give them up, Warne.’

‘I’ll see what the woman says, sir,’ said Will, too cautious to pledge himself.





CHAPTER IV.

HOUNDS AND CANVAS—THE PICTURE PAINTED.

‘You have some nice young hounds, I see, Warne, this season,’ said Charlie, as he gave Johnson and Archer their coffee.

‘We have, sir,’ said Will; ‘we’ve got good places where they goes to “walk,” most of ’em tenant-farmers, sir, and good sorted ones, as hunts theirselves. At first, as you know, I daresay, sir,’ said he, ‘they riots and runs hares, because they see so many of ’em about the farms; but if there’s any good in ’em, they’ll drop it, after a kill or two and just a “rate,” though noise I don’t hold good with as a rule.

‘My father—a fine seat he had, sir—was very quiet. He’d say, “Quiet huntsman, quiet pack;” and “A noisy cubbin’ bad for

huntin'." And so I've found it, sir. The less you say,' said Will, 'the more hounds think of you. With young hounds, if you "lift" 'em, they'll throw their heads at every fool as shouts, and wait for help at every nick you get, and bother you.'

'How many do you take?' said Archer.

'Five couple o' the old to ten o' them, I mostly gives; that makes 'em thirty, sir, and it keeps 'em steady. I let 'em have at first an easy kill, one cub a day, sir; then, as you saw at Pirton, sir,' said Will, 'a brace; and after that, when we can, however, a dig out.'

'You should ha' seen 'em first dig out we had, sir,' said he to Johnson; 'but you warn't there, sir, 'cause you don't hunt—it were at Paysley Coppies, sir. When I got the cub, and come out o' the cover with him, they thought I was a-doin' 'em out of him, they did; and them young hounds, sir, got as wild as wolves, as though they meant to

have the cub or me! Didn't they, Mr. Archer?' said Will.

'Yes,' said Archer; 'I thought they certainly meant to have you, Warne.'

'Why did you not let them have it there, where you dug,' said Johnson, 'and so have pacified them?'

'O, ask those gentlemen there about that, sir,' said Will; 'that wouldn't do, that wouldn't, sir, at any price; scare all the rest. A fox won't stay where hounds have had "a worry," not if there's covers handy.'

'You find those great woods awkward, I should think?' said Johnson.

'Awkward at times, but very useful, sir, for varmint foxes, and some good straight runs in the season. They do the hounds good too; they makes 'em hunt, sir, and so improves the lookers and the listeners; and we gets both.'

'I suppose you soon can tell what your hounds are?' continued Johnson.

‘Well, yes, sir,’ said Will. ‘If they’ll face gorse and blackthorn, and not babble or skirt, and are low-scented, good drawers, and come to me with their mouths shut when it’s all over, then I know I can make a pack of ’em.’

‘Their mouths shut?’ said Johnson.

‘Yes, sir,’ said Will; ‘it tells o’ good wind, sir. I don’t like pantin’ hounds.’

‘I don’t think,’ said Burton, ‘that any Hunt has better hounds than yours, Warne, dogs or ladies.’

‘No, sir,’ said he, ‘that’s right enough. They’re all as I like ’em; well made and with good wide ribs, that lets their lungs have room, and makes ’em able to give their fox a start, and catch him after. And as for the little ladies, sir, where will you see crisper ears and brighter intellingenter eyes than they have, bless their little hearts? They’re beauties, they are, and not a lemon among ’em!’

‘Then you do not like lemon-coloured ones, Warne?’ said Johnson, who, of course, knew but very little of hounds.

‘I don’t, sir,’ was the reply; ‘nor them whites. Dark is the best, sir, for lasting, in horse and hound, though mine’s a gray; and a good horse he is too. Pied-black, or tan, or badger, not too high off the ground, and with a build like mine. Them are the darlin’s, sir, and no mistake,’ said Will. ‘Straight legs and strong loins; and a good square head and slantin’ shoulders; and round feet and a deep note; and not too long bodied, sir, and with good short starns.’

‘You are not a long-stern fancier, I see,’ said Archer.

‘Not for the woodlands, sir,’ said Will; ‘they gets so ragged; and bare starns makes ’em mean. You see, sir,’ said he, ‘in the woodlands they must hunt—they’re bound to do it. The pace my hounds will bustle a fox through some o’ them thick

woods o' yours, when the scent is cold, is a surprise to many; which tells me, sir, as there's a bit o' the old bloodhound strain in 'em, or they couldn't do it; they couldn't, sir. They're steady with it too! Too much dash I don't like; they overrun the scent, as you know, sir, and swing too far before they finds it out; which makes it bad for all of us,' said Will.

'Well, now then, Warne, if we may trouble you again,' said Johnson, as he finished his coffee, and he saw Will was rested. 'Sit just as you were before; with your pipe in your left hand, and your right arm on the chair, where Hector is to stand. Easy to yourself, please, now, and forget I am sketching. That's it; thanks. Yes, as you say,' said Johnson, 'too much dash is not good; that early woodland work must scare the foxes.'

'Just what we want,' said Will. 'It makes 'em quick to move, you see, sir, and

they don't hang in the cover in the season. The more you rattle them young cubs about, sir, the better runs you'll get when they grows up. It sends 'em out a distance, and learns 'em the country; so gets 'em confident. That's the making o' foxes, that is, sir. A good confident fox, as knows his country, will never skulk or hide; but as soon as hounds are in, he'll stretch his white tip out, and go straight ahead; as much as to say, sir, "If you don't know the country, I do; so you will not catch me, this side Monday week!" And he swings along easy-like to hisself, not caring whether the hounds see him or no.

"Well, that you see, gentlemen, does the hounds good," said Will; "it aggerawaites 'em like, and gets their bristles up; because they're always a-thinkin', "If we put on a spurt, we shall catch him now." And then the pace improves, and they don't catch him; and then, with a whisk of his tip, he

has 'em again for a race; and the gentlemen say, "A fast thing, Warne; this is good sport." So if even we don't kill him, sir,' said Will, 'they goes home contented and happy-like; as is a great comfort to me, Mr. Johnson, as has to show 'em the sport, and do all as I can to help the subscriptions.

'Why, sir,' said he, 'as these gentlemen know, we've one fox who's beat us for seven seasons; and whenever we draw his covers, we dare not so much as let a gate slap, or tap a hurdle in the turnips! The least noise, and my lord's off; and it's then "catch who catch can;" for when he does go, it's with his black nose out and his brush straight!'

'Do you kill many cub-hunting?' said Johnson.

'Well, sir, when foxes are plentiful,' said Will, 'as in our woods, sir, unless you can give an account o' sundry brace in the cubbin', you'll have nothin' but cover ridin' afterwards, through fresh foxes a continually

getting up; besides, there are them strangers always a-comin', and so makin' more of 'em; foxes, sir,' said he, 'as are bred elsewhere, but "travellers;" they likes the big woods, sir, because they're safer.

'I thins 'em out, though, p'raps as much as most; for as our meets are early, sir, we mostly drops in for a good scent; so kill the quicker. Late suppers, you see, sir, with the foxes,' said Will, 'is the same as with us—they makes 'em lazy-like at early mornin'; and so the young hounds often gets "a view," which puts their bristles up, and makes 'em fierce. Our cubbin' too, sir, is a long one; for most of the woods round has pastures between 'em, and so what grain there is lies wide and nice, and out o' the way; so it does not hinder us. But if it's a dry time, and we have to wait for wet, why, then very often it is all got off before we can make a start of it.

'You see, sir,' continued Will, 'till the

grass damps, it's o' no use; you may as well try to kill a helefunt with a puppy dog! Wet we must have; though when it's very wet, the outside's best, better for the youngsters—the little spinnies and the ash beds, and such-like, sir; better nor in the deep woods; because the wet gets in their ears from the bushes, them youngsters, and bothers 'em; and it makes them slack to draw. A close and "muggy" day's the day for me,' said he, 'if there's air enough about to stir the leaves; with a nice drizzling mist, if we've got strangers with us, and want to show 'em what our hounds are like. They will go then, sir,' said Will, 'and no mistake.

'But what I don't like, sir, though a breeze is good, is high wind blowing. Wild weather, sir, makes wild hounds; and so I've found it. Foxes get sleepy too, then, sir, and the hounds draw over 'em, where the underwood is thick with grass or sedge.

And sometimes if it's windy and wild over-night, the earth-stoppers will bank 'em in; because, you see, sir,' said he, 'instead o' bein' out, they stopped at home.

'It's awkward too, sir, is wind; as hounds can get away without a note heard, and p'raps slip out at the bottom of a cover, five or six couple of 'em, as I've known 'em to. And too much wet,' said Will, 'that I don't like again; not on the grass-lands, though it helps the fallows, and makes the scent there better, though stiff ridin'.'

'Don't move that arm a bit,' said John-son; 'thank you, Warne. I won't detain you long. Yes, rain helps you.'

'My hounds are good for one thing,' resumed Will; 'they won't open till they're sure; so when they do, it's then "Look out! a fox"—and Dick scans the rides at once. They're good at noise too, sir, and seldom stir unless it's one of us. With crow-lads out by scores, and bird-tenders, by reason

o' the miles o' orchardin', we have,' said he, 'to be stiff with 'em at all noise; so they gets used to "ratin'" when they hears it; and so in time they leaves off noticin' it. But time has been, sir,' said Will, 'when we've come among the woods at first, that I've gone a mile or more with 'em, only to find a crow chap, screeching away at some confounded birds!

'A good day in the woods will scratch their faces too,' said he, 'and make 'em pluckier when they're in the open; and the great strong briers and the gorse-clumps that we get there makes 'em poke less at the blackthorns. It's good trainin', sir; helps 'em to go through life properly! With hounds like ours, Mr. Johnson, as are used to the rough of it in them tangled-up woods as we gets in our Hunt, the pace don't flag when we get in the enclosures; for, you see, sir,' said Will, 'a good woodland hound will face all he gets in the open, and at a good

pace too; and as for a gorse-patch, why, he'll work it splendidly. Used to the thorns, the prickles don't affect him.'

'Like many, Warne, in this same world of ours,' said Johnson, 'whose lines, not falling into pleasant places, take rough with smooth, and think but little of it. Now, Archer,' said he, 'let us have that, if it is ready. Yes,' said Johnson, surveying it, as Archer handed it to him; 'somewhere about it, I think. Let him see it.'

'That, Warne, is how we fancy you will come in best,' said Archer, as he showed it to him; 'but if you don't like it, say so, and we will alter it.'

'Well, I think, gentlemen,' said Will, smiling all over his face as he looked at it, 'as it's just about it. It shows me in the bower with the hounds, just as I've been a hundred times or more; enjoyin' o' my pipe and talkin' to 'em. Yes, that'll do, right well, sir, so I think. A very putty

picture too it is. The woman can't say I'm a-screechin' there. It arn't Will Warne "the huntsman" though; it's Warne "in private."

'There's one thing I forgot, sir, this here pimple,' said Will to Johnson. 'I hope you'll have that out, as it's a small un. I shouldn't alleys like to see it there, sir, as that jug's by me. People maybe might say things as wern't right.'

'I don't think that,' said Johnson. 'It gives "character."' '

'Asking your pardon, sir,' said Will, 'I thought the other; and so might lead to character agoin. Better by far be out, sir, if you please.'

'We'll paint it out, then, if you like,' said Johnson.

'He's made you look good-tempered there,' said Charlie.

'Well, so I am,' said Will, 'when they don't press my hounds, sir, or override 'em; or make a row and lift 'em.'

‘If they do,’ said Burton, ‘they catch it, I suppose?’

‘Well, no, sir, if they’ve reason. If they haven’t,’ said Will, ‘I sing out, “Blame it, gentlemen, don’t hurt my hounds!”’

‘Yes, I have heard you say so,’ said Charlie, ‘and have often laughed to hear you. What makes you say it?’

‘Say what, sir?’

‘Blame it!’

‘Well, I suppose to save—well, sir, something stronger. You see, sir,’ said Will, ‘my father was a serious man, by token that his father were a preacher; as used o’ Sundays to go round the Greens, and take him with him, to give the hymns out, and lead the country folks a-singin’ of ’em. Well, as a lad, sir, I was bad, no doubt—at least I s’pose so—for I know I got in for lots o’ quiltins, for words unproper. I never liked it, but it did me good, and drove it out o’ me; so when I “whipped in” to him with

the hounds, sir, and had to "rate," we drew the line at "Blame it!"

'And well it was we did do so, sir,' said Will; 'for when the old man died—leastways he broke his neck, and didn't live—our young Sir Charles, who'd just then got the pack, through the old Sir Charles's death, he put me on, sir, "Because," said he, "you know your business, Warne, and never swear; a practice some huntsmen," says he, sir, "are rather 'given to.''" "And never won't," says I, "not if I know it. I hold, Sir Charles, it's low life!"'

'You are right, Warne, so it is,' said Archer.

' "I don't swear myself," said Sir Charles,' continued Will, '"nor will I let my men. When people are excited in the hunting-field," says he, sir, "it is a habit easily picked up, but difficult to drop again; so by my own example, and by that of the

men about me, I discourage it; and I always let persons see that I dislike it."

'Now p'raps you'll laugh, sir,' said Will, 'and why, p'raps I'm wrong—but when I hear people swear, I often think, "Though I'm a poor man, I'm a cut above you."'

'And you are right too,' said Johnson; 'I agree with Mr. Archer, and there cannot be two opinions about that. There is no need for it, no matter how excited a man is or how emphatic he wants to be; it is simply bad, and, as you say, Warne, "low life." How long have you been with the hounds, Warne?'

'Come Candlemas, at least a week short of it, sir, a matter o' thirty year, I should say. Let me see, sir,' said Will. 'I married Maria—my woman, sir—when I were thirty and First Whip, as I think I said, sir, and our old man died just that time nine year; and I'm now—if I live till May, sir—sixty-six. What'll that bring it to, sir?' said Will.

‘Twenty-seven,’ said Charlie, who was always a sharp youth at figures.

‘Then that’s about it, sir; seven-and-twenty year, and we’ve never fell out yet. That is my nephew, sir, the First Whip, Dick, and George, the Second Whip, he were his schoolfellow. They’re good lads both, and handle horses well, and hounds too very well. You’d be surprised now, sir, when we divides, as we have to do, you know, sometimes, sir,’ said Will, ‘and Dick casts round one side and I the other—like we did that day at Darnley Woods, Mr. Archer, when you jumped the fox out o’ the hedge-row, and missed the finish through casting a fore-shoe—how well he acts. A rare good lad is Dick,’ said he. ‘If he lives long enough, he’ll take my horn—the Master’s partial to him. But, there,’ said Will; ‘I hope I’ll see some good runs yet myself for many a year; but as old father broke his neck,’ said he, ‘I might break mine; because

where my hounds go, I'm bound to be with 'em; that's where it is, sir.'

'Yes; hunting has its risks as well as its pleasures,' said Archer, getting up to look how the picture was progressing. 'Some good carnations there, Johnson,' said he, pointing to the picture, and noticing the tones that had been got in on the cheeks.

'Ay,' said Will, as he caught the word; 'I like them good carnations, "cloves" we calls 'em: the woman has some underneath the window—that's in the summer, sir—in her own patch, and I've got some in mine.'

'You don't have the same patch, then?' said Johnson.

'Well, no, sir,' said Will; 'she likes more o' your fancy sorts—roses on sticks, like mops; I stick to "cabbage," as are quite as sweet, verbenums, and such-like, and red geranias. Now I like,' said he, 'princes'-feathers and sunflowers, and creepin'-jennies and honeysuckles. She takes to vilets too,

as I can't bear; they're nasty things, and grows in woods alarmin'. They spoils all scent. I've often wondered, sir,' said Will, 'as they've scent for jockeys, as they don't make some for hunters; 'twould sell in winter well, I fancy, sir, called "Tally O!" when there's no such thing, like now, as getting a sniff; for if there's one scent as I think is better nor another, sir, it's fox scent. I calls it heavenly, and the hounds adores it.'

'Well, Warne,' said Charlie, laughing at old Will's depreciation of his favourite 'Jockey Club,' 'until you can invent some, dust their noses with a "brush" night and morning, their only chance of fox scent yet awhile, for the snow falls faster, and it is like to fall.'

'You have got that quite in half-light, I see,' said Archer, still surveying the picture. 'It might be lighter.'

'Well, don't mind me, then, sir,' said

Will, 'if you'd like the blind up; for, as you say, sir, it is but half-light, and it might be lighter. My eyes are good uns still, sir, though they're old.'

'Thanks. All right, Warne,' said Archer. 'That is quite "a feature," Johnson; I like that,' said he, as he pointed with his mahlstick to Hector, who was limned on the canvas, looking up at Will.

'If that's my nose you mean, sir,' said Will, 'it is a feature, and one I'm proud of too. It's like the Dook's; leastways a gentleman from London said so—that is, a gentleman's gentleman, sir,' said he, 'as lived in a park lane somewhere up there, and 'as—so he said, sir—had to sit in a big box by the door, days; that were, I expecs, sir, to see as no poachers didn't meddle with the rabbits; and he said it were werry like indeed, sir, as he used to see the Dook—that were when he were alive, sir; he's dead though now, sir, as you know, killed at

Waterloo, the great battle as we've heard tell of, sir. Yes, that I do hope you'll do justice to, sir, for it arn't a pug, nor a mulberry, nor pimpled as I've known some have it.'

'If you stick to grog though,' said Johnson, 'it soon will be.'

'No fear, sir,' said Will.

'But a great deal of risk,' said Johnson. 'You shall have justice done to it, depend upon it.'

'Much obliged, sir. Then, if you've done with me, sir, I'll be goin',' said Will. 'Ther'll be a deal o' weather about, I can see, sir.'

'O, don't mind home at present, or the weather. We will have some chops about,' said Johnson, 'and you shall join us; and then, if you are not too tired, we will get you sit again; we shall have the nose perfect then. What say you, Warne? You will not be wanted at the Kennels, you know, and

we will cab you home again, and tuck you in, when you start, warm and comfortably.'

'Well, thank you, Mr. Johnson, very much,' replied Will. 'Will Mr. Burton mind, sir, or Mr. Archer?'

'They will mind you don't go back without your dinner, and so will I,' said Johnson. 'So sit you down, old gentleman, and when your time is up you have but to say so.'

'Well, thank you, gentlemen, then if you don't mind my company,' said Will, 'I'll stay. The woman never waits; she'll have her dinner.'

'Right,' said Johnson. 'Then we will now leave off and have a chat—fill your pipe, Warne—on the hounds and hunting. Touch the bell, Charlie.'

'Here, my good girl,' said Johnson, as a diminutive whitey-brown personage presented herself; 'give that to Mrs. Jones.'

When on the mat outside, she read the paper: 'Old Burton ale and chops, or steaks,

for four.' So she smacked her mouth, did pantomime, and vanished. She thought of pickings.

Will stayed and dined, and sat again and talked; had tea, and left, snug in a cab, and tucked up comfortably.

'By Jove,' said Archer, as they came in from seeing him off, 'what a night it is! You will never get up Severnside to-night, Johnson, I should think. Better turn in with us, old fellow, at the Fox.'

So Johnson did so. 'I hope, Master Will,' said he, 'will stick to his promise, and not let that cabman entice him to have anything on the road. He said he would not; but if he does, cold as it is to-night,' said Johnson, 'it will get over him; and, so far, he has had nothing with us that will hurt him.'

'He must take his luck,' said Charlie; 'and if he will be a stupid, he must be.'

'I hope he won't,' said Archer.

Unfortunately, however, their care of him was soon after nullified; for the cabman, with the importunity of his race, pleading the cold, so far influenced Will's good nature, as to induce him to 'stand treat' on the road; Will, determined to be true to his word, remaining in the cab.

'If I may be so bold, sir,' said the cabman, looking in on Will, 'would you allow me to bring you a drop o' somethin' at my expense, sir? I don't like,' said he, 'to see an old gentleman like you, sir, a-settin' here, sir, a-doin' nothin' on a night like this. Now, allow me, sir, please,' said the fellow. 'Just three small pennorth o' brandy, neat?'

'Not a drop,' said Will. 'Drive on.'

'Would it be troublin' you, sir, to get out for a bit, sir?' said the man, peeping in again. 'I'm afeerd there's somethin' the matter o' my wheel; and I shouldn't, of coorse, sir, like to run the risk o' upsettin'

a gentleman like you, sir, as has a thought for a poor fellow of a cabman, when his inside's cold. Thank you, sir,' said he, as Will got out, in no very good humour at having thus to wait.

'Now be quick,' said Will, as the man pretended to be fumbling at the wheel.

'It's the tire loose, sir,' said the fellow, telling a barefaced lie for the chance of drink. 'Now that's ockard,' said he; 'for all the cabs and the cars be gone to the thehater; and mine,' said the vagabond, 'is the only one left. What ever is to be done, sir? It's dangerous, you see, sir, for an old gentleman at your time o' life to be standin' out here on the pavement, with the snow a-blowin' and the wind a-cuttin'; as is the cause o' poor people goin' consumptive and dropsical; and yet you see, sir, though there be a beautiful fire inside, and werry warm and comfortable there, I can't make so bold, sir, as just to ask you to step in-

side, because I can see the company you been use to, sir, wouldn't allow o' your demeanin' yourself by goin' where there's only poor people like; or else,' said the scamp, seeming to brighten up, 'I could really, sir, have this put right in a quarter of a hour or so, that I could;' which, seeing there was nothing to put right, was certainly a safe assertion.

Now, if there was one thing Warne disliked more than another, it was being thought 'proud.' So he went in sulkily, and sat down, doggedly determined on one point at least.

'Ah,' said the fellow, sidling up to him, 'it were werry fortunate as I met with you, sir, werry fortunate. Now, sir, when I were on the box, the cold brought the colic; and it were a-gettin' worse rapid, that made me bold to ask you, sir; but Lord bless you, sir, that's took it werry near away, and I'm thankful to you for it, as it has saved me

p'raps bein' laid by in orspital, sir, which is ockard with a family to look after and provide for. I do hope it'll go off all right, and not come on again.'

'If a drop more will do you good,' said Will, 'I will pay for it; but be quick.'

So the fellow tried the remedy again for the imaginary complaint; Will in the mean time going to the door to look at the weather, which was worse; the snow driving down in larger flakes than ever.

'Here's a night!' said a voice Will recognised, as two people he knew entered, and stamped about shaking the snow off them. 'Hillo, Will! You here, old fellow? What are you having? Nothing? Well, if that is not the way to get "cold innards,"' said one of them, using Will's words he had so often heard, 'what is?'

The upshot of it all was, that the fatal word set up such a train of thought that Will's good resolutions went to the wall;

and in a great measure—with that old excuse, ‘for company’s sake’—was the cause of his reaching home, not much the matter with him perhaps, but still ‘market peert.’

‘A cab indeed! What next, I’d like to know?’ were the words with which he was received as the cab stopped at the Kennels, and Will got out, feeling his feet cautiously, as his wife came to the door.

‘’Scuse me, Maria,’ said he, being careful to be not too fast in the delivery of what he had to say; ‘but I’ve been, you know, and had my picture took. They’s drawed it lovely, and sent me home a perfect gentleman.’

Quoth she, ‘I see they have. Warne, you come in!’





CHAPTER V.

ASPECT OF THE COUNTRY—SPRING APPROACHING.

FEBRUARY, the ‘budding month’ of February, was now almost at an end, and the traces of the hard winter had nearly vanished. For the snow that drove down so fiercely on the night the old huntsman felt the effects of it, and that continued with but little intermission for a fortnight, whitening the country, and making the roads well-nigh impassable, had ceased.

And the thaw that followed it had not only filled the brooks, but had overflowed the river, so that the flat meadows beside it were flooded ; making the view up the valley—by the greater breadth of water that was there—still more beautiful, to those who

had nothing to lose by it at least, if not to the farmers.

But with the exception of those who had lost a lamb or two, or had some of their sheep washed away by the sudden and rapid rise of the river in the night, and of which they had not been aware until it was too late, there had as yet been but little grumbling amongst them; for they hoped, if the snow continued to go as gradually as it was going, that after the first rush from the Welsh hills was over, the flood would not be a washing one, but one that would lie awhile; and so, by fertilising the ground, give them good heavy swathes at haymaking.

There was certainly a good deal of snow under the hedges, where it had blown up the banks, and in the hollows, and in the woods and the coppices; and the deep drifts between the covers on the hills, where they were five feet high at the gateways, were as

high as ever. It would be weeks ere they melted; but as the days were lengthening, the sun getting more power, and the temperature increasing, all round there hoped that, 'at last,' the worst of the winter was now really at an end. For the fields were brown, and the turf was green again; and trees were budding, blossoms showing, and the birds were busy.

And the indications that the spring was at hand increased. Partridges were pairing, hedge-sparrows building, and rooks hung about the rookeries. The tap of the nut-thatch could be heard, and the black-birds and thrushes sang lustily; the yellow-hammers and the chaffinches were about again, and the linnets and the goldfinches were seen; and the skylark soared high when the sun shone.

And there was a bleating of lambs in the pastures, and a cry as of jays and of magpies. And snowdrops lay patched in

the orchards, and primroses were in clumps on the hedge-banks; the furze had some gold in its greens, and the daisies were pinking.

Buds were on the alders, and catkins on the hazels; the coltsfoot was on the clays, and the marigold in the marshes. The tomtits were away from the eavings, and the redwings and fieldfares were thinning; owls could be heard in the night, moles were beginning to be busy, and woodpeckers were on the wing again. Gnats could be seen in the sun, and violets smelt in the morning; and there was a cooing in the woods, and a flutter of young pigeons in the dovecots.

Men were on the fallows, and gardeners were in the gardens; and there was a general planting and sowing going on all over the country. Draining-tiles were about, and hop-yards were thought of; hedges were being trimmed, trees lopped, gaps

stopped-up, and gates mended; and the prospect of a good year was the topic with the wheat-sowers.

For they all knew that a good hard winter killed the insects, and that it sent the leaves out; not curled, or shrivelled, or eaten, but straight and strong; leaves that would stay upon the trees, and shelter the buds when they peeped out. And they also knew that when the snow lay long, the grass strengthened; for with the soft warm covering and the frozen top, as it could not get long it got thicker. And they were all agreed that for heavy orchards and linking hops, there was nothing so good as a hard winter.

And now, having had a hard winter, 'one of the old-fashioned sort,' as they said, the farmers looked forward with confidence, to having with one crop and another, a fair year; so that when you met with them, there was a general heartiness and jollity

about them that augured well, and that made you feel hearty and jolly too; notwithstanding that if you came upon them suddenly, their grip was of the tightest; as doubtless best expressing the warmth of their own feelings, now that things promised to be looking-up a bit; and so make up for the past year, when hops were light and the fruit was thin; hops and fruit being, as was well known, the chief mainstay with the majority in that district.

In all the country houses, and the farm-houses too, round that quarter, the yule-log had been lit, and put by till Christmas came again; the holly and the ivy had been taken down, and the mistletoe left up; to hang there, with its berries now off, plucked in the kissing, till a new bush, berried all over, was brought in again, with the holly; to look down on the good fare that passed beneath it, and the laughing and struggling couples that were so often under it; and to

catch hold of the curls of the merry girls who were held up to it, till they had picked their berry, and obtained release; a release that was not always wished for, when the hoister was young and good-looking.

And the hounds had been out again. And the brooks had bothered the hunters, and the soddened ground had punished them; and there had been but few of those with hounds who had not brought home with them more or less of another man's land; for the soil stuck when you fell, and the dirt remained when you got splashed; and painted faces were the rule to come home with.

More than once had Andrews come to grief, and applied a mud plaster to his scars: scars that remained from the fall we have heard of. Several times had Burton been down, as he thought more of pace than of surface; and John Archer too, for the most part, had kept him company. Wells had

turned out, and had also turned over; and Warden and Oliver had been of the company. King had 'picked a knife up,' and others 'had looked for one;' and Sir Charles Kerrison, the Master, had not escaped. Will and the Whips had had their tempers tried. 'Blame it!' had been heard, and tail-hounds had been thonged.

Altogether, there had been as much tumbling as riding; though, as Charlie observed, after getting an extra rattler, it was of little consequence, for 'the more falls the more fun;' and that now John Archer's new 'pink' had got the gloss off, and showed more of the claret than the scarlet, the appearance of his coat was considerably improved.

And John Archer had moved to Hazlewood, to be with his tenants, the Brandons; and his usual bachelor's party before going there had come off, and a merry one it was, as usual. At home at the Grange, at Grantley, he was near to all his friends, as Johnson

lived but three miles from him, and Andrews but five, and Oliver, at the farther end of Honeybrook, was within eight miles of him.

Burton and Raymond of Holmwood, and Warden of Deepdale, the next village to it, were also near to him, as it was but six miles to the three of them. And to Dawson and King, up the valley, at Dyneley, it was about the same distance; and to Wells, who lived four miles beyond them, he was also within a nice ride, as Royston was but ten miles from Grantley. But when he moved to Hazlewood, which was ten miles the other way, being down the valley, the ten to his friend Wells became twenty; and the distance to his other friends was increased in proportion. So, as a sort of farewell for a time, John Archer always gave a bachelor's party.

And at the party which had just come off, lamentations were heard that it would be the last, or perhaps the last but one, they should have there; for as they were all living

within a ring fence, as it were, the intended marriages had become common talk, and they were no longer a secret. And as the pretty hamlet of Hazlewood was within two miles of the hamlet of Coombe Hill—near which was Peyton Hall, the residence of the old Squire, the Master of the Harriers—Charlie Burton, who was of course the foremost of the chaffers, got paid in kind, by the frequent allusions to his great fondness for golden hair, and those who had it; all of which, as he was the best-tempered fellow in the world, he took kindly.

But as John Archer intended to be away till the end of the hunting season, for the handier hunting of the county at the other end, and would therefore be some six or seven weeks at Hazlewood, he had thought it best to put on a working fit; and with old Johnson at home and at hand to keep him up to it, there had been a considerable smell of paint and turpentine in the little room at

the Grange ; for the picture of the mares and the colts was on the easel. The branches of the old tree had been lengthened, the colour on the trunk had been hit, and the colts had been worked on ; and they were now some of them in half-shadow and some of them in the sunlight, as he told Wells he should paint them.

The picture was thus so far forward that little remained but to do a bit more at the thatch, and to paint-in the white pigeons on it, that he had thought, when he was up at the Rookery, would come well, over the chestnut colt. So by dint of sticking to it, he managed to get it finished and framed in time to stick it up at the party, for general comment and criticism. It stood the ordeal, was thought a good picture, and Wells took it back with him.

Johnson too had completed and sent off the Storm pictures, and had made good things of them ; and the picture of Will and

the hounds had been so advanced that it could be finished in a week. Therefore, as Archer's share in the painting was the larger—for as it went on he had decided to put in the hounds himself—it had been arranged that, as soon as Johnson could spare the time, he should put his traps in the dog-cart and bring them and the picture, which, having removed it from his studio, he had now at his own place, the Rosary, and stay a week or so with him at Hazlewood, as there was a lot of good sketching to be had there, and they could then work at it and get it out of hand.

Besides which, the daughter there was a pretty girl, with a 'Greuze-like' head, as Johnson said when he saw her, and he had a great idea of trying to copy it in some of the many times that Archer could keep her in conversation, so as to work it into a 'Madonna' picture, when he had the fit on him. 'Not a Spanish Murillo one, you

know, old fellow,' said he; 'but an English one, with eyes all innocence, and cheeks peach in tint.'

'Now don't,' said Archer.

And Miss Archer was at the Grange, Miss Clare at Bristol, and Miss Johnson at the Rosary; and thoughts in the Johnson and Archer families ran much on one topic, with a tendency to look forward more hopefully and eagerly to one season and that summer, and to one month and that June, than to any other portion of the year then before them; which, considering all things, was not much to be wondered at; or that the thoughts of Miss Archer and Miss Clare should connect June roses with orange-blossoms; or that they should both of them have frequent visions of Brussels lace and bridesmaids.





CHAPTER VI.

FLORENCE MILLS AND CHARLIE BURTON.

AND Archer and Johnson also, having about this time quite as much of chaff from Master Charlie as they could well stand, they felt bound in self-defence to give it him back again, which they were certainly able to do with interest, as to a certain Miss Florence, his frequent visits to the Hall, and his electing to go now and again with the harriers instead of the fox-hounds; a retrogression that in their minds—Archer's at least—was only to be justified on the chance of having a good jack hare up; but that was in March, and March had not come.

So Charlie caught it; for it was evident that, with such a straight-goer as he was, he was not going to turn out for a hare when

he could ride to a fox, were there not something special to be got by it. And as to marry the niece it was as well to be in with the uncle, the baseness of his conduct as a sportsman was accounted for; he therefore got let off easier than he might have been.

Florence — or rather Miss Florence Mills—was the only child of an officer, Captain Mills, who, marrying Miss Howard, sister to Mrs. Burton, Charlie's mother, lost his life two years afterwards in Ireland, in some eviction disturbances, when his regiment was stationed in Dublin. Mrs. Mills then returned to England with her child, and took up her residence at Leamington. There, three years afterwards, she died of consumption, that had been induced by her continued grief.

The child, Florence, thus left an orphan when she was but four years of age, was adopted by the old bachelor uncle, Squire Peyton of Peyton Hall, who, brother to

Captain Mills, had changed his name from Mills to Peyton when he came into possession of the property.

It will therefore be seen that Florence Mills was Charlie's cousin; but that 'the old Squire' was no relation to him. The aunt, Mrs. Burton, greatly wished for the care of her dead sister's child, and that she should always be with her; but as Mr. Peyton had been such a friend of the family—the bosom-friend of her late husband—and was godfather to Charlie, she yielded her claim to his wishes.

So, at four years of age, Florence Mills was transferred from the quiet home at Leamington—a sorrowful home to her, poor child, had she been old enough to have understood it—to the larger surroundings of Peyton Hall; and with a governess to attend to her and a servant specially to wait upon her, she commenced life afresh, petted by her uncle, with whom she had always

been a favourite, and made much of by all the people who were about him. No wonder, then, that with every wish gratified, and caressed and indulged as she was, the little lady should grow up a spoiled child.

Florence as a child was simply beautiful; for what with her dimpled chin, her laughing eyes, and her sunny curls—curls literally golden—her quick intelligent look, almost too intelligent for her baby innocent lovable little face, hers was more the sort of ideal face that one sees in books, and that artists paint, than one that we meet with in reality.

And as she grew up she proved a marked exception to the rule that pretty children make plain girls; for her beauty remained, and it increased as she matured. And as she retained with it all that innocence of expression that she had as a child, and that made her, with her happy look, a favourite with every one, no one who did not know

her would have the least idea of the fun and the frolic and the mischief that was still in her. When she came there as a child, twenty years ago, she was a pickle, and a pickle she had remained, as all those about her were frequently finding.

Her cousin Charlie, who was a few years her senior, used at first to assume the big brother, and patronise and protect and see after her; as he was then often up at his godfather's as a playmate for Florry; but he very soon found, after she got accustomed to the great place, and could feel at home, that she was quite as capable of taking care of herself as he was of himself, young as she was; and that there were few who, if they got into difficulties, could better get out of them than Miss Florry; or who if they had a tumble headlong, could get up quicker or say less about it.

So that when he used to act the big dog, and go scrambling about with her on him,

or be her pony and kick up when she whipped him, or do the Newfoundland and the terrier, and roll about with her for the mastery, he always knew, however hard she fell, there would be no words about it. As to crying—it was on record that she looked sorrowful once, for a minute, when she got a very hard one; but she never was known to cry, not in any one's hearing at least.

In fact, she was a hard one, and Charlie liked hard ones; for he, as a lad, was always open for a fight—if they would hit and not smack—with any boy; and as he grew up, one of his testimonials at school, to the admiration of the lot of them, was his always being ready 'to lick any lad his size,' and to decide any question on the spot by single combat, on the one condition, to hit hard and be friends afterwards.

His other testimonials for the well-liking of him by his schoolfellows were—and to his credit be it named—that he never told

a lie; you never heard him swear; he would get any lad out of a scrape, or help him with his lessons; and hammer him as you may, you could never knock the temper out of him. In short, he was hard and good-sorted, and a little gentleman, and he remained so. Genuine pluck shows breed, for your snob is a cur; and Charlie had the one, and he was not the other.

He and Florence therefore were, as children, suited to each other—plucky ones alike; and the fun they had at times was very great. As for climbing, though duly lectured by her governess on the impropriety of her goings-on, she was always coming in with torn frocks, scratched legs, or dishevelled hair; for she would be after the nests in the spring, and after the nuts in the autumn; and her favourite seat in the summer was up in the boughs, for the breeze. And she was just as bad at paddling—wet stockings constantly—either in

the pool-tail for the rushes, or into the brook for pebbles—anything, in fact, to be on the move, or in mischief.

But as she was always on the scamper, she never took cold, for all her wettings; and she was oftener bareheaded than not so. And such was her flow of spirits, there was no restraining her. One day she would be in disgrace for jumping the pony into the garden and riding him barebacked round the walks; the next for getting put on the shafter in the team when they came up from the farm at the haymaking, and risking her neck when she whipped him. Or she would get into trouble for catching the donkey, and persisting in mounting, though he threw her; or come in with her frock reddened over by lying at the rabbit holes, listening; or have her long curls all filled with the hay, by burrowing under the cocks like a mole; in short, never was child scolded like that child.

And the young puss was artful too with it, for as she got older she got hardened; and being aware that gout troubled 'uncle Peyton' whenever he 'put himself about,' she invariably managed, in spite of Miss Bland, her governess, to have her own way, and to get what she wanted; for when the young minx met his denials with 'I shall so fret, uncle, if you don't let me, and then I should be so sorry, because that would vex you, you know, and give you the gout; and that would be so very bad for you, would it not?' he thought it better to yield, lest he should have it.

But as time went on, the two wilful ones, Charlie and Florry, were parted; for Charlie, from being weekly boarder at a school in the neighbourhood, was sent to a school at a distance; and from there to the college at Cirencester. And Florence also was sent away, for Miss Bland could do nothing with her; and as she was now a

great girl of fourteen, it was thought quite time her wild ways were checked a bit; so after frequent puttings-off by the uncle, and a mutual fretting with both of them, it was finally decided that she should be placed under the care of two sisters of Miss Bland, who kept a school at Kensington; and that to break through all old associations, her holidays should be spent in Town and in Brighton, with friends of the family; her old uncle going there to see her, instead of having her home with him at the Hall.

And after she had been three years there, and the staid walks in Kensington-gardens with the rest of the pupils had taken the place of the rompings in the Hall shrubberies, she was sent to Paris, to finish there her education; her uncle still continuing to visit her at short intervals; and when she had been two years more under tuition, she left Paris, and resided for twelve months with her friends in London; where, in the

refinements of the society to which she was introduced, the last trace of wild ways was eradicated, and the tomboy of fourteen came back to the Hall, after an absence of six years, an elegant lady-like girl of twenty; very real, very little aware of her attractions, and still joyous and fun-loving, but toned down.

When therefore she came back to the Hall, and Charlie used to ride over to see her, there seemed to have been a great gap between them; and this feeling was increased by the difference between old days and present ones; for he soon found that, although they were cousins, she had still the same objections as ever to being petted or patronised, as, though not vain or indeed anything like it, London society had taught her somewhat of her own importance, and she would not have been a woman had she ignored it.

After a while, however, they got along

together very well; for as she was often at her aunt's at the Grange, or Charlie was up with her uncle, they were always seeing each other; and as Charlie favourably contrasted with all others she saw there, she came by degrees to feel somewhat of a cousinly affection for him; which was in no wise lessened by the tiffs and quarrels that between the most loving of cousins will sometimes happen.

And after they had quarrelled and made it up again for three years, there seemed nothing now to quarrel about; so, from being amiable and forbearing towards each other, they became loving, and for the past twelve months they had been on the best of terms.

Still, however, no absolute engagement existed between them; for whenever Charlie did think of marriage, he invariably put off all decision thereon until some more convenient season; but as of late there had been others in the field, and the young

lady, to tease him, was inclined to play the coquette, and to be fast and loose with him, he at length determined to go in and win, or, as he used to do at school, punch somebody's head—that somebody being a gentleman who, as he thought, was oftener at the Hall than he need be—only he could do nothing till the hunting was over; as that of course could not be neglected for anything, whatever happened.

But when that ended, he would see—yes, he would see; for he really did love her; but then it was so natural to love one's cousin, that the climax of marriage had not seemed necessary to insure a mutual continuance of the affection. The knowledge of the marriages that were impending served, however, as a stimulus; for with Archer and Johnson married, there seemed as though there would be a break in the brotherhood, and that a general settling down was perhaps advisable.

His mother too had of late taken him to task a time or two as to his frequent visits to the Hall; and had told him that he ought to let it be one thing or the other—gain her love himself, or give others a chance to do so; that she, Florence, was now four-and-twenty, and he, Charlie, was thirty; and that therefore there could be no objection on the score of age, if they really loved each other, and felt they could be happy together; and that it was scarcely fair to Florence to keep her in doubt as to his intentions; and that if he wanted her, and she would have him, she, Mrs. Burton, had no doubt the uncle's consent could be obtained.

Charlie was not behind the scenes. There was nothing, as Mr. Peyton had told Charlie's mother, that would give him greater pleasure than seeing 'the young people' brought together; but, as he said, 'Leave them to themselves, Mrs. Burton,

leave them to themselves.' The only condition he laid down for them to have his consent was that they should reside with him. He would thus be spared the pain of losing Florry, and she — Mrs. Burton — could continue at Boscabel; all which amicable arrangement was totally unknown to the 'young people.'

Mr. Peyton, as we have named, was a very old friend of the family, and a bosom-friend of Charlie's father, who died when he was young; for the same fortunes seemed to connect them. Charlie's family, the Burtons, as we have also mentioned, had been uncompromising Royalists, and had suffered in consequence. So also had the Mills family—Mr. Peyton's; the Hall having been partially burned and dismantled by the Puritans—the crop-heads—after a stern defence, and a running hedge-fight in the adjoining fields.

They had thus been accustomed to talk

of old days and of old doings; and when the Squire quoted the line on his ancestor's tomb, in the church on the hill by the Hall, 'Loyal to his king and faithful to his country,' old Mr. Burton would, with equal pride, quote that on the tomb of his ancestor—that was so close to Boscabel in the gray church at Holme Wood—'True to his king, and a gentleman.' An union between the two families would be therefore like bringing old times together again.

And it so happened that, on this bright February morning, Charlie Burton, with an overcoat over his scarlet, was riding down the avenue under the oaks and the firs from Boscabel; to go to John Archer at Hazelwood, and thence to the Hall, to the Squire's, to dine with him; for the morning of the morrow was a 'lawn meet' there, a meet of the fox-hounds; for he was a preserver of foxes, being an old Church and King man, though being a master of harriers he could

seldom find time to do much more than ride with his own pack.

The ride from Boscabel was a pretty one, for you went along through the woods by the river; the water that was now out all over the meadows obliging one, however, to ride through it, in places where the meadows were low, and the woods shelved down to the flat of them. But that did not matter to Charlie; for with the prospect of big brooks on the morrow, he was on the good mare we have heard of, who bore him so bravely from Henley.

And when he reached Hazelwood, he found John Archer at home, and just starting for a turn about the farm with Brandon; so he saw to the mare, changed his clothes, and went with them. And as he found that Archer was to be one of them at the dinner, he was very glad; as it would save him having to leave quite so early—he had arranged to dress at the farm and sleep there,

as they were full at the Hall—and they could come back together. A room was always kept for him at the Hall, that he might stay there when he pleased; but he had given it up for that evening to two friends who were invited, Archer having offered to find a bed for him at his place.

But when they had returned, and had lunch, and were looking at the crocuses and things in the garden, chatting to Miss Brandon, a clatter of hoofs near them made them look to the lane; when Charlie ran off with his hat raised, and was down through the gate in a minute. For the person he spied was Miss Mills, who reined up when she saw him, and the groom, Carter, was behind her.

Shaking hands with her cousin and with John Archer, she thanked Rose for some flowers and evergreens, that she had kindly sent up for her, to aid in the decoration of the tables in the morning; and also for a

welcome addition from her father to their own stock of cream.

The Brandons were excellent people, though they were plain and homely; and the old Squire was very partial to both Rose and her mother, who were often up at the Hall with Mrs. Barrow, the house-keeper, a nice motherly woman; and who were going to be ensconced in Mrs. Barrow's room in the morning, 'to see the company and to see the hounds.'

Cantering off with a smile, and an admonition to Charlie not to be late, Florence left, and he and John Archer turned in again.

'By Jove,' said Archer, 'you are a lucky fellow, Charlie, to have such a cousin. Were I not already in the lists,' said he, 'I know where I should look. Go in and win, Charlie boy; she is a splendid girl, and I know she likes you. Why, her very hair—if my dear Jenny had not almost the counter-

part of it—would be enough to make me in raptures with her. Join us, Charlie; she will make you a good wife. You need never,’ said he, ‘want a better, old fellow.’

But pretty as she looked in that dark habit, with her turned-down collar and a cherry bow, when Charlie brought her on his arm to dinner—where she did the honours with true grace and ease—he owned she was a beauty; for dressed becomingly in black and rose, she looked most charming.

The old Squire had the gout, which, as a matter of course, vexed him greatly, as it stopped his riding; and he had hoped to have gone well on the morrow with those who were younger, and to have taken Florence with him; for having foxes in the Home Wood by there, a find was certain. However, as Charlie said that he would see to Florry, he promised she should just go to see the find, and watch

them from the hills, but then she was to come home again.

Poor girl! he little thought, with her in all her beauty, how near to death she would be on the morrow.

The dinner passed off well, and all enjoyed themselves; and none the less that all good things were temperate.

Soon after coffee and some songs by Florence, Charlie and Archer left for Hazelwood; and after a moonlight walk across the park, reached home before eleven, and went to bed; Archer to dream of doing wondrous fences, and Charlie of the fair face at the Hall.





CHAPTER VII.

THE HALL, THE CHURCH, AND THE VILLAGE.

PEYTON HALL, the residence of the old Squire, was a plain stone building of three stories, that was built in between two sand-stone towers; the one tall and ivied, and the other ruinous and rose-covered; and it was situated on a high knoll in a deer-park, that sloped up from the hamlet of Coombe Hill.

Projecting from the centre of the building was a spacious portico, that gave access to a large entrance-hall, that was hung round with armour, antlers, skins, and hunting trophies; a carved-oak table on the one side of it, and a slab on the other, being covered with old weapons and curiosities, and having underneath them some cannon-

balls, 'Cromwell's messengers,' that had been dug up in the neighbourhood, or found in the butts of the old trees that from time to time had been blown down there.

On the right of the hall was the dining-room, and on the left was the drawing-room; and beyond, up some steps, was a landing that ran the whole length of the building, and from which a staircase at either end led to the upper rooms. Opening out of this landing, and fronting to the gardens and the fish-pools, were the breakfast-room, the morning-room, the housekeeper's room, and the library; and on the other side of it, at the back of the dining and drawing rooms, were the kitchen and the other apartments.

At the extreme end of the hall, in the circular recess between the library and the breakfast-room, was a stained window, the height of the hall, filled with old glass, and having on a stage beneath it shrubs, ferns

and flowers; their arrangement being due to the taste of Miss Mills — the Florence we have spoken of.

The ivied tower at the side, entered at the back by steps from the terrace, contained two rooms; the lower one being furnished as a billiard-room, and the upper one as a smoking-room, a winding staircase in the buttress giving access to them; and at the top was a look-out place, railed round securely, from whence you could see over the surrounding country and up the valley, the deep blue outlines of the Welsh hills terminating the view. At the base of the tower was the tool-house, where Florence fadded with plants, snipped the dead leaves, and potted geraniums; the gossiping old gardener being generally at hand to give his young mistress the benefit of his experience; and close by, in a little aviary, were her doves, that used to coo to her while she was there.

The ruined tower at the other end—rose-covered in the summer—contained but one room; and as that was littered all over with rods and fishing-tackle, wads and guns, whips and sticks, and flies and feathers, and as there were quoits in the windows and bowls on the floor, it was easy for any one to divine whose room it was.

And it was there that the two inseparables, niece and uncle, passed many an hour together; she skimming the news, or reading the *Field* to him; he busy with his flies—he was a rare old fisherman—or, ‘all attention,’ dropping to sleep in the midst of it. She could make as good a fly as he could; so she would often finish them for him, he going on with his nap; and she would sit by him and say nothing, when he would wake up and bother himself; for he could not always understand that he had really finished them.

As the room was hung round with sport-

ing pictures of every description, some of them representing scenes now happily obsolete, and as all the books there were more or less of a sporting character—hunting, fishing, racing, driving, and so on—Miss Florence reckoned amongst her useful knowledge a considerable amount of sporting information; and she was thus well able to hold her own when Charlie and her uncle were fly-making, and the conversation was argumentative. And as her uncle had also a set of small lawn-bowls and some light quoits, when she was about he never wanted for a companion; for with her one-pound quoits against his two-pound ones, she could often get a ‘ringer,’ and sometimes beat him.

The lads in the stables had to look about them too when she was at home; for there were few things connected with grooming and stable management that she was not conversant with; and they all knew when she looked in there, to feed and to talk and

to mess with the horses, that the white handkerchief would be out; and woe betide them if, on applying it to the coats of her pets, the least dust soiled it!

She also knew every hound that was in the kennels, and they would all come to the rails when she called them. And she could set wires in the hedge for the rabbits, and traps for the moles in the meadow; and if you wanted some trout, she could catch them. She could ride too to hounds with the best of them, and jump any fence that she came to. In short, there was not much that she could not do; but for all that she was a little lady in conversation and in manner, and quite as much so as many of the prim ones, who, demure to the world, can be fast in tone and fast in talk when it suits them.

But with Florence all was on the surface: what she wanted to say she said, and what she did say she meant. In fact, she

was one of those impulsive, good-hearted, warm-loving girls, ever ready for a frolic, and ever open for fun, who, knowing no harm, think no harm. Would there were more of them!

To the left of the Hall were the stables, and to the right were the kennels; each with ample accommodation for those belonging to them, and screened by the shrubberies, that flanked the towers; and in a circular clearing in the one shrubbery—that next to the ruined tower—were the poultry-houses and the dovecot.

And there it was that, in a morning, Florence was to be found, scattering the grain to the fowls, and feeding the pigeons, that would perch upon her shoulders; and amongst the pigeons were some white ones, that, being special pets, were allowed to come back to the house with her, and to have a kiss each to return again. But when, on warm mornings in the summer,

she used to stay by the old tower to cut fresh roses for the rooms, her snow-white friends were in no hurry to go back again ; for it was pleasant and bright there, and the sun lay in patches on the grass ; and they had a great idea of perching on her arm and her basket, and making themselves, on the whole, rather too busy ; so that she had often to crush some roses and well pelt them with the petals before she could get rid of them.

Sometimes, however, as a special mark of her favour, they were allowed to come and coo about her at the back of the house, under the verandah, when she was busy there with her flowers ; or to flutter alongside her between the rhododendron banks, down the steps to the rosary ; or to the croquet-ground, where the moat used to be ; or on to the patterned garden that was beyond it, down some more steps ; or even to the pools by the wilderness, so that they might have a long fly back again to their

dovecot, when her fawn-coloured Skye came and startled them, which he used to do as often as he durst do it; he having no idea of anything else being petted there but himself, Prinnie being a spoilt dog, and always accustomed to go off on the hunt for Florence, if he thought she had been away long enough, or he had settled it to his own satisfaction that at least his services must be wanted.

But Prinnie's proudest moments were when he could see his young mistress go out with her riding-whip in one hand and some bread in the other. Then he felt it quite incumbent on him to bark and bound and to scout about; because he knew the black pony was going to be had out, that followed Florence all round the shrubberies, and was then ridden back by her, and that the procession would not be complete without him. Though if Florence chanced to forget he was by, and made that wonderful

pony tip up, and, with his fore legs over her shoulders, stand to be munched, with his cheek to hers, as long as she would let him, Prinnie's pride would change to the direst anger, and the embrace had to be terminated, lest in the extreme jealousy of the moment that pony's tail suffered.

And walled out from the grounds, by the fish-pools, were the kitchen-gardens and the glass-houses. And out of the wilderness by a wicket was a road to the church, that was built high up on a mound by the Hall; and as it was a right of road there the villagers used it, as it was nearer for them than the road through the park.

It was also at all times a pretty road, as it came by a lane to the fields, and over the brook by a bridge, where trout used to lie and you could see them; and on through a nut-grove, so dense that the hazel-boughs shadowed the pathways. And the steep ground that was above it was rocky, and

the road wound by steps to the top, between banks that were primrosed in the spring and hung with wild roses in summer.

The church, which was gray, old, and weather-stained, had a Norman doorway, a wooden porch, a wagon-headed roof, tie-beams, and bell-cot; a good deal of ivy, and a few yews; and the churchyard all round it was above the paths, and the floor of the church was below them. Inside the church there was a large octagonal font, some fire-place-looking monuments, and some recumbent figures; the effigy of a former owner of the Hall, and to which allusion has been made, being amongst them. A rood-screen, curiously carved, separated the chancel from the nave, and a modern marble reredos—the gift of a lady in the parish—connected the old with the new.

The village itself—the hamlet of Coombe Hill—was like most of the villages in that part of the country, and consisted of half-

timbered houses, black and white, and brown and white; thickly-thatched, yellow-mossed cottages; outbuildings, with house-leek on them; old inns, with high sign, trough, and tree; cider-shops, with benches by them; ale-houses, with seats; and a windlass-well, under a pent-house.

At the top of the village was a huge elm in the middle of the road, the turning-point and the critical point—for they often used to fall there—for the ponies and the donkeys in the Wake races. And at the bottom of it were the pound and the stocks and the smith's shop. Elms were by the road, and alders were over the palings, and there was a great running to greenery in the gardens, and cottage flowers were in abundance.

Children were on the pavement, fowls were in the roadway, and old women were at the doors; there was a runting and grunting of pigs in the pigsties, a frequent flying of pigeons, and a steady travelling of rooks

from the rookeries. . A man on foot was an excitement, a man on horseback a sensation ; the wheelwright, as clerk, was an authority, and the smith, as 'the viol,' was looked up to ; for 'the instruments' still reigned triumphant in that village.

When the new reredos was given to the church, the old rector thought it a good time to do away with the instruments, and to substitute for them the harmonium which was offered, the schoolmistress understanding it, and promising to play it. But the singers struck, and they continued to strike ; 'the wives of the instruments' making it their business to go round to them, so as to keep them up to the proper pitch of rebellion.

'It oona loikely,' as one of them, Betsy Morris, the spouse of the violin, remarked, 'that theer be any religion in them "armonies," wi' a bit o' a chit o' a girl a-playin' on 'em, loike what theer be on the instru-

ments, when four male feythurs o' families be a-doin' justice to 'em!' Which proposition, seeming to have weight in it, was at once acceded to; and strengthened by Jemima Mason, wife of the viol, and aunt to the flute, whose mother being 'a-washin', she spoke up for him.

'I'se sure, though I says it,' said she, 'the way that feyther o' foive chilthren, an' a pair on 'em twins—as youn brought many a one on 'em into this world, Mrs. Jill—goes roun' the buildin' wi' that flute o' hisn, atween the verses—now up i' the bames, and then down i' the flure, twisting about theer till he can cut in suddint wi' the rest on 'em, when they bosts off wi' verse two,—well, it be affectin', werry much so; that's what it be!

'Now music loike that be religious; so's the clar'net, Mrs. Perkins'—thanks from Prisecilla for the compliment, as her husband played it—'and the viol, petickler

for that—I alleys did saay it, and I ool saay it—be loike somebody a-spakin' awful to you, specially when he comes that scrape as you feels it in your stomach.'

'That be a-bringin' the power o' music home to you, if you loike, Jane Jill, and bates all your babbies o' cryin'; tho' far be it fro' me to run down your bisness, Mrs. Jill, as I be a mother o' three myself, and you gets your livin' by it;' which thoughtful speech Mrs. Jill duly appreciated. 'If they drops the instruments,' said Mrs. Morris, 'then good-bye to all religion; and I dunna carr if the oud parson knows as I says it; theer now. No, I dunna!'

So as such was the spirited attitude taken by those interested in it, the rector had to give way; as the Squire went more with the old times—the reredos was a pill for him—and he hated anything like a fuss and a bother. Therefore the old state of things was continued, the rector's teeth being set

on edge and his temper tried every Sunday by the tuning of the instruments, and the dreadfully irreverent way in which the whole of the singing was conducted there.

The surroundings of the village were meadows and orchards and corn-fields; a few farms, a great many ricks, and two or three hop-yards; the bulk of the hops being grown higher up the valley. The road to the Hall from the village was by a long avenue of oaks and elms, that swept in a curve through the deer-park, and which you entered through iron gates at the gate-house, which was red, like the towers, and of olden date; the gardener living in the one side of it, and the groom—Carter—whose wife was the laundry-woman, in the other.

In the front of the Hall was a lawn, with a round fountain in the middle of it, a few shrubs, a few flowers, and a wide circular drive; the garden in front terminating by a sunk fence, that separated it from the

park, and gave a roadway below it to the stables and the kennels.

Peyton Hall was formerly a fortified manor-house, and the strongest of the many houses like it that were round about that quarter, the traces of which are still everywhere apparent, in the shape of old buildings, moats, mounds, and trenches.

After it had been partially destroyed by fire and shot during the civil wars—as we have mentioned—the old place remained a ruin for years, until, troublous times having passed away, the present house was built, and joined on to the old towers; which it was decided to leave standing for the sake of the picturesque, and as a memorial of former days.

As it is not improbable that some day before very long there may be gay doings in that hamlet, we have thought it well to describe here the village, the Hall, and the church.

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CHAPTER VIII.

THE OLD SQUIRE AND THE LAWN MEET—THE RACE AND THE RESCUE.

‘THE old Squire’—Squire Peyton—was a hale old man of sixty-eight, tall, and square built; with crisp white hair and a florid face; and apart from the gout—the gift of good living—healthy and active.

A Master of Harriers, and a lover of all sports, he was to all intents and purposes a gentleman; one of the good old stamp; full of their good qualities, but free from their foibles; fond of a glass with a friend, but no bottle man; liking a pipe, but no sot. Moderation in all things was his maxim; and neither in his own house nor elsewhere would he ever take more than was good for him. The consequence was, that all about

him were temperate, and his household was orderly.

By the farmers, whose grounds he went over, he was much liked; and as he mopped his forehead after a kill, his 'Best run of the season, gentlemen; the finest run I ever had in my life!' was always known to be forthcoming, no matter what the run was. A kill to him was like a victory to a general—he scarcely knew how to contain himself; so thoroughly did he enjoy it, and so much did he enter into the spirit of it.

And he was equally elated with a kill with the fox-hounds; though it was not very often that he could contrive to go with them. Time was when he never missed a day with them, and was foremost in the field; as the brushes in his hall, and the pads on his stable-doors, duly testified. He still, however, rode well, and went pluckily; and he could show many a younger man the way across country when they had a

straight-going hare up, and a good scent—times when you could cover his beautiful pack with a sheet. No hounds could be more musical then they were, or run better together; and as there was always sport with them, those who went with them were sure to be satisfied.

He repaired the fences, and he spared the wheat; and every farmer had a hunt hare in the season; so when the men sung out, 'The 'ounds be out, mayster!' the farmers brightened up, and they did not say, 'Drat it, Jonah!' or 'Consume it, Samuel;' for those who could go jumped into the saddle, and those who could not turned out to see them. They knew with the Squire's hounds there was no harm done, at least none worth speaking of; and he was too good a neighbour to them for blank days to be known to him; for he kept every man to the adlands and the furrows by his watchful "'Ware wheat, gentlemen!' so that when the coursing meet-

ings were held in his meadows, hares were plentiful.

All liked him — farmers and villagers, workpeople and cottagers; for he had a kindly word for all at all seasons, and help from him in sickness or sorrow had only to be deserved and needed for it to be rendered promptly and cheerfully.

And on this last day of February, the old man was up and about, and as busy as any of them, although he had gouty slippers on—a bar to his joining the meet, as he hoped to do. And Florence also was up and busy, and taking counsel with the housekeeper as to the disposition of the decorations and the laying of the tables. And very pretty she looked too, as she flitted about with her flowers, or, perched on a high stool, linked the greenery. For the sun that came streaming through the east window along with the morning freshness kept making bright gold of her hair, and whitening the white of her

dress—the white dress that had blue stripes upon it.

An hour before the time fixed for breakfast—ten o'clock, as the meet was to be at eleven—all was ready ; so that, when the first arrival came—Charlie Burton as a matter of course, kindly allowed by John Archer to start first—she was at liberty. Whether between the time of his arrival and the old Squire's return from his dressing-room any alteration in the disposition of the decorations was suggested, we cannot say ; but we fancy, by the flushed look of both Florence and Charlie when her uncle came in noiselessly in his slippers, that the cousins must have had a scuffling time of it, and been hurried ; which was a pity, as it obliged Florence to run up to her room to change her collar and to smooth her hair, and so she had but little time for a chat in the housekeeper's-room with Rose Brandon and her mother, who had just arrived.

However, she was ready when the rest came, and in her place at the table; Charlie, as her cousin, assisting her with the coffee and seeing to the wants of those about him; the Squire's 'Now, Charles, my boy, see if you can make yourself useful down there,' being all-sufficient for an eager compliance on his part.

And he looked very saucy, and was very jolly; and every one there enjoyed himself; the only regret being the inability of their host to come out with them, and the absence of the Master; Sir Charles Kerrison having lost a relative but a few days previously.

The breakfast was much the same as other breakfasts on like occasions—from game-pies, tongues and chickens, to sirloins; set off with racing cups, and ferns and flowers. Champagne and sherry, home-brewed too, and coffee; and 'jumping pow-

der' for the very nervous; and for all outsiders bread-and-cheese and ale.

When no more would have coffee, Florence vanished, and reappeared ere long in riding-habit. Then, as the hounds were on the lawn, she kissed her uncle, and promised she would not be long away; for fences on the north side were still frosty, and he therefore did not wish her to go with the hounds, as, not knowing what fear was, she was not, as he knew, to be trusted, unless he was with her himself. So she was merely to go with the groom to see the find, and then come home again.

As Warne and the hounds left the lawn her horse was brought—a long low dappled bay; fast, temperate, and clever, an easy goer, and with a mouth that answered to the bit; and with the groom at his head, and assisted by Charlie, Florence mounted. Then picking up the reins like one who knew what she was about, she and Charlie

followed the hounds down the avenue; John Archer having discreetly moved off previously with the rest of them.

Now, while Charlie was waiting on the steps for Florence, the groom, Carter—a steady-going sort of fellow, whose wife was laundry-woman—having managed to get him away from them to look at some point in the horse he was holding, said in a low tone:

‘I do wish, Master Charles, we were not going; at least the young mistress. We shall be sure to get found out, for she is so very wilful, sir. I know she will jump him!’

‘O, nonsense, Carter!’ said Charlie; ‘she is not a child. You will soon be back again. It is all arranged, and she has promised to return as soon as hounds go; and they will find for certain,’ said he, ‘in the Home Wood. Don’t fidget yourself.’

‘That’s where it is, sir,’ said Carter; ‘she

always promises, sir; but then as soon as she gets the chance, she looks behind to me, sir, and says, "Carter, I am going to have a gallop, and a jump or two." Well, sir,' said he, 'it isn't of course for me to say, "You must not, miss;" so off she goes, and I have to follow. Then, instead of one or two just nice little ones, she will get doing ins and outs, there and back again,' said Carter, 'all along the road, when she thinks there's nobody about who can see her; and not content with that, sir, when she's got his blood well up, sir, she'll race him—put him on the turf, and go like mad; and then pull up, sir, and laugh, with her pretty curls all a-blowing about her. Then, having had her game, Master Charles, she'll say: "Carter, hold his head, while I do my hair up. We are going to be orderly." It's all right then, sir; but O, sir, she do vex me, because if the master knew it, he would put it all to me.'

‘Don’t bother yourself,’ said Charlie. ‘Miss Mills knows how to manage a horse, and this one she is used to; at the same time, Carter, as there is a catch of frost about, keep an eye to her, as the best horse may fall sometimes.’

‘She won’t change her mind, sir, will she?’ said Carter.

‘Certainly not,’ said Burton.

Acting on Carter’s hint, however, ‘I say, Florry,’ said Charlie quietly, as they rode together down the park; ‘you mean to come back again when the hounds find, don’t you?’

‘I don’t know,’ said she.

‘But you promised your uncle, did you not?’

‘Yes,’ she replied; ‘but I did not say which way, Charlie.’

‘Now, don’t go on, Florry,’ said Burton; ‘I shall be vexed if you do, because he asked you not to.’

‘I shall have a gallop before I do come back,’ said she.

‘But not with hounds, Florry; not with hounds?’ pursued Charlie.

‘If I do, I can stick,’ said she.

‘Now, Florry,’ said he, ‘don’t you be wilful, there’s a dear girl; but get straight back again, as your uncle is middling.’

‘Now, don’t you excite yourself, Mr. Particular,’ said Florence; ‘I daresay I can take care of myself.’

‘For my sake do so,’ said Charlie.

A loving look was the answer; and John Archer riding up to them, and looking well in his scarlet coat, that was now well-stained, the conversation ceased; and they turned out of the avenue together through the lodge-gates.

In two or three hours afterwards, those gates were again opened, and a car passed through them; but instead of continuing up the avenue, it was observed to turn off

over the turf, just where it would have come in sight of the Hall, and to be driven round to the road by the church, where, a little way to the left of the Hall, it stopped.

Three people then got out of it, and leaving the car there, they went round through the shrubbery to the stables. One had on a torn riding-habit, another a scarlet coat, split up the back, and as dirty as the habit, and the third was in a gray suit. They were Florence, Charlie, and a doctor, a Mr. Clifton, who was the surgeon at Aynsley, a village six miles distant from the Hall, and three from Holme Wood, Burton's parish.

'Look here, you fellows,' said Charlie, to the men who were there; 'you 'see Miss Mills? She is not hurt, nor am I; so if you like the value of a crown amongst you, keep your mouths shut till I tell you. Now, while we wait here,' said he, 'you

go, Denham, and ask Mrs. Barrow to come here. Say Miss Mills is come; and be quick about it.' So the man went directly.

When Mrs. Barrow, the housekeeper, returned with him, Charlie met her.

'O Mrs. Barrow,' he said, 'my cousin has come back with me, but as the ground was slippery, we have both managed to get a tumble; and as we are rather dirty, while I get a bit of a wisp, she wants you to get her uncle out of the way while she takes off her habit, so as not to put him about, you see. This is a friend of mine, Mrs. Barrow—Mr. Clifton; and while you go in with Miss Mills, we will have a look round the stables and follow you.'

'It is very thoughtful indeed of you, Mr. Charles, for the master is but poorly,' said Mrs. Barrow; 'but as he was very tired after the breakfast, he has gone to lie down a bit, and he said I was not to call him till lunch-time.'

‘Then we will follow you directly,’ said Charlie, as Florence went with her.

Mrs. Barrow, who was a prudent woman, was afterwards let into the secret; and Florence lay down for an hour. Charlie’s coat was then sewn up and sponged; the doctor went back in the car; the housekeeper persuaded the old gentleman, as Miss Mills had come back, to have his lunch sent up, and to lie till dinner was ready; and the servants were tutored; so that by the time the Squire came down, the groom had returned with Charlie’s mare, and all was in place; Miss Mills, ‘having a headache,’ begging to be excused joining them at dinner.

So Charlie and the Squire dined alone; and he managed, by a little manœuvring, to pass over the account of the run till after dinner, when, as he said, he should be able to give him chapter and verse about it; as he, Charlie, had promised, on the strength

of the narrative, to stay the night there, so as to be the better able to tell him all about the day's doings.

As soon as dinner was over, Charlie slipped out to see, as he said, 'how his mare was getting on,' and he then sent a man to Hazelwood to Archer. But before Burton came back, Mrs. Barrow, acting on the hint she had, had almost persuaded the old gentleman to return to his room, and Charlie's own arguments settled it; so the account of the run was again able to be postponed, till counsel had been taken with Florence; who, going into her uncle's room to see how he was, let him also see that she herself was well; and then, by a forced gaiety, she managed to put him off as to her own account of the find, on the plea that she was tired; 'But when you come down to tea, uncle, you shall hear it all.'

Word had been also sent to Boscabel to Charlie's mother, by the doctor, who kindly

promised to go there himself, lest the news should reach her; and he was also to tell them to send word to the Rosary; and as no one, who was likely to have heard of the escape, could come to the Hall without Charlie seeing them, they felt pretty safe in delaying matters until they could think things over as to her uncle.

So Florence and Charlie had the evening before them, to arrange as to the best mode of breaking it to him; for, as the bay horse was dead, there was no getting out of it.

‘O Charlie,’ said Florence, when she came down-stairs to him and kissed him, ‘I am so glad I have got away from uncle, for I could not have held up much longer; and that dear horse too. To think that I shall never have a gallop on him again, poor fellow! Are you sure you are not hurt, dear?’ said she.

‘Quite sure, my darling,’ said Charlie.

‘But your face, love, it is as red as can be?’ she said

‘It is nothing but where the steam caught it, Florry; your uncle did not notice it, as I remarked to him how warm the room was. I cannot imagine, my dear girl,’ said Charlie, ‘how you could have stuck to the bay as you did. The very fright was enough to have dropped you.’

‘I never felt frightened, Charlie, till the train came. I only felt vexed; vexed that you should see that he was master, and that I could not hold him; but when that fearful whistle came, and I knew it was a train, and I heard it coming round the corner, and I could not even then stop him—O Charlie, I shall never forget it!’ said Florence, ‘never!’

‘Well, don’t think of it, Florry; try not to. Don’t let us talk of it to-night,’ said Charlie, seeing that a little thing would

make her hysterical; 'the doctor told me not to.'

'But my dear bay,' continued Florence; 'whatever are we to do? We must tell uncle the truth, Charlie.'

'Yes,' said he, 'we must; but as you are safe, Florry, he will bear it.'

'But did the fall quite kill my pet?' said she. 'Tell me, Charlie; don't be afraid; do, there's a dear fellow; you see I can bear it. Now do, Charlie; how was it?'

'Well, Florry, it was in this way,' said Charlie. 'When we came full cry across the lane, then it was that I first caught sight of you; not dreaming that you had not gone back long ago. Your horse was then up in the air, fighting; and before I could reach you, thinking he would fall over with you, you lashed him with your whip, and he bounded over the fence and bolted.'

'Carter followed, and I jumped it with

him; and we both raced for very life to reach you; bearing to right and left of you, fearing he would go the faster if we were behind him. But there,' said Charlie, 'let it rest, Florry; it would be wrong of me to tell you now, for I can see you are too excited. It will only do you harm, dear. Let it be.'

'No, tell me, tell me, Charlie; do tell me,' said Florence. 'You know you said you would, love, when I was calm. You promised me; and I am calm, and I will be calm. Now do, Charlie.'

'Well,' said Charlie, 'outstripping Carter, then, I gained upon you, for my mare fled; when as I hoped that I should reach you, darling, I heard the whistle as I jumped the fence, and knew it was the express—the 12.15; and then I saw it sweeping towards us, and the bay horse racing, and you quite powerless to check or hold him.

‘A ball rose in my throat as if to choke me ; I felt spell-bound. I don’t know what I did, or said, or shouted. I only know that I could give no help, when you most needed it and death seemed so certain ! Oh Florry, kiss me !’

And as she, sobbing, nestled closer to him, he told the rest.

‘I spurred and spurred ; did everything I could, to reach you, Florry ; when just as all seemed quite to swim before me, and your wild scream, love, hit me at the heart, I felt the dear mare springing to the spur, and touched you ; and as the bay horse bounded for the rails, I swept you from him, and we fell together ; and you, thank God, were saved ! The mare went head-long, and the bay was killed.’

She pressed him to her, for she could not speak, and kissed him through her tears.

‘Come, cheer up, darling ! don’t you cry

so, dear,' said Charlie. 'You have borne it all so well; now don't give way! Don't, Florry dear; you don't know how it grieves me to see you thus! Come, come, my darling! There now, dry your tears. There, kiss me.'

When she was calmer, after a pause, he told what else remained.

It seemed that where they fell the ground was very soft and muddy, from a snow-drift thawed there; but the shock and pace had so far touched the heart, that the senses felt it; so that when the doctor came, he feared concussion, as they both lay motionless. But the station luckily was close at hand, and water and some brandy brought them to. Some cars were plying there, and one was brought, down through the meadow there, to where they were. And then, as soon as Florence had revived, Charlie, who was more queer himself than he would own, hurried her into it with the

doctor ; and getting in himself, they managed to take her away from there as quickly as possible, before she had time to realise much about it ; for the bay lay dead, on the other side the line.

When he rose at the rails, as Charlie swept Florence from him, he cleared them, but fell upon the metals—it was a level length there—and being caught by the train, was hurled away and killed instantly.

The mare, hit by the bay, when Charlie, overbalanced, dropped with Florence, staggered ; and catching in the reins that had been let go, fell headlong ; and then lay there, half stunned and all of a heap, as the reins, which were round both her legs, pinned her head down.

As soon as Carter came, he cut the reins ; for as Charlie and Florence lay insensible, he thought them dead. The doctor happened to be in the train, and saw them, as did others, fall together ; so as the train

stopped at the station, he jumped out, and ran down beside the line with the porters.

The mare the groom led home, after he had rested her and bathed her sides—scored terribly; and the body of the poor mangled bay was taken care of, until directions should be sent about it. The rest we know.

And as Charlie and Florence continued to sit together, she became less hysterical and calmer; and it was arranged between them that, when her uncle came down to tea, Charlie should break it to him as well as he could.

‘O Charlie,’ said Florence, as she kissed him, as he pressed her to him, ‘how good you have been! I can never repay you, never, dear! You have saved my life!’

‘To have it, darling, I hope, in my keeping.’

Her uncle entered. She looked up and smiled, and then, with Charlie, she rose up to meet him.



CHAPTER IX.

A GRAY DAY—THE BRIDGE AT HOLME WOOD.

THE middle of March was at hand. And the day had been a 'gray day'—a day of driving rain, and of moving clouds; of bending rushes, and of wind-stirred water. Gray sky above, gray patches in the valley, from pools cloud-tinged. A blowing, showery, gusty sort of day, with shifting lights, and momentary change of sun and shade.

But towards the evening the gray in the sky rifted, and the rain ceased; the mistiness was dispelled, and the landscape showed again. For the only grays that remained were the gray of the cloud-shadows that came floating down the woods, and the gray strip that was left where the high hills met

it; but there was blue sky over it, and white too, in the blue of it.

And the deep rich greens by the river were giving place to the yellow greens, that stole across them in the sunlight, with the long shadows of the poplars. The broad fallows too, where the wheat-sowers had been, were the browner for the wetting; and the teams were 'ploughing down' in the hop-yards. And the wind that had buffeted the young lambs all the morning had dropped, and they were flirting about in the pastures; and the birds were singing.

There was a fresh smell of mould in the air, and a scent of wet shrubs and of flowers. And the leaves of the laurels were shiny, and the leaves of the hollies looked varnished; and there was a dripping from boughs that was pleasant, and a glittering of grass, as the cattle moved from under the trees to the open.

And there was a great cawing of rooks, and a crowing of pheasants, and a cooing of doves in the woods; and you could see the bright beady eyes of the squirrels as they moved in the branches above you. And the river looked deep blue and steel, and there was only a ripple upon it.

The spring was approaching.

The birds were building, and the colts-foot was yellowing, the sloes were whitening, the greens were blending, and the chestnuts were unfolding; and the young red leaves upon the oaks were changing bare stems to boughs. The yews and the alders were in flower, and the sorrels were showing; the mistletoe was in blossom, and there were buds on the hazels; the ground-ivy was blue-tipped, gold was on the willows, and bees were busy at the butter-burr. Daisies were plentiful and buttercups abounded; daffodils were by the water, primroses in the copses; the willow-

wren had come ; and all spring flowers were thickening.

And the big woods that came shelving down to the valley, jutting into black points of firs and yews, no longer looked upon a breadth of white; for the floods had subsided, and the only trace left of them was the line of dead sedge upon the banks, that showed where the water came, and the withered look of the grass where the mud had covered it. All besides was green, and bright green where the cattle were—the white-faced Herefords.

Ten days had elapsed since the events of the preceding chapter. And the old Squire had been told of the race and the rescue; and the bay was buried, Florence was herself again, and a new horse was promised her; and Burton had notoriety; for there had been particulars in the local papers of the rescue, and the neighbourhood had been full of it, to his great annoyance, and

the general disturbance of his equanimity of temper. Archer was at Hazelwood, and Johnson was in town again; and as Mrs. Burton was away on a visit, Charlie was by himself at Boscabel.

So he thought he would have his bachelor friends to see him; and it was on the evening of that day that they were coming. Wells and Raymond, King and Dawson, Oliver and Andrews, Frank Freeman from the Liddiats, Griffin—Jemmy Griffin—from the Woodend, and Clifton, the doctor, from Aynsley, who had come up so opportunely at the time of the accident. He was a married man, but the rest, as we know, were bachelors. Archer begged off, and Johnson had an engagement; or else, as Charlie said, ‘there would just have been a dozen of them.’

And as the shadows of the poplars lengthened, and the sun came streaming down the meadows, catching the spray of the water as

it leaped over the weir, Harry Wells rode over the bridge that was at the entrance to the village—the village of Holme Wood.

It was a tell-tale bridge ; for whatever was said there or near there, or at the turn-pike, or at the cottages beyond it, could be heard distinctly from the one to the other ; so that a man need only come fishing there a few times to know all the gossip that was going on in that village, and to be quite as conversant with the inner life of the cottagers—their confidences and their grievances—as any of the inhabitants.

For with the exception of a few straggling cottages, the row on the bank constituted ‘ the village ; ’ and hence it was, that if those at the mill by the bridge could hear what was said at the cottages, the cottagers were quits ; for they could tell the miller every day as to his callers and customers, and the quantity of flour and of other products that was ordered there.

Not that the roses named it to the honeysuckles, and the honeysuckles told the ivy, and the ivy repeated it to the briony, or that the briony blabbed it to the bushes, and the bushes let it out to the willows, and the willows whispered it to the poplars, and the poplars to the elms; for though such is the way in which news does generally get about—at least, if books are to be believed—it was not so in this instance; purity of atmosphere and relative position being all-sufficient for the purpose; and Nature was thus enabled to dispense with her usual system of telegraphic communication.

Altogether the bridge had its inconveniences as well as its advantages; and the unthinking couples who made it a trysting-place in the evenings never could really understand how it was that their fond utterances could be known, and repeated to them at ‘the shop,’ word for word, when they went in there the next day for their

little commodities; or that their kisses could be numbered and told to them. And so it was, that when the servant-girls about there were taken to task about their respective 'goings-on,' when Echo was in fault, mistresses were blamed.

The fishermen too were sadly bothered by it when they came there for the greyling or trout fishing; for the exclamation of 'Quick, Jack, he's a big un!' would at once bring such a troupe of youngsters from the cottages, that the on-coming of the native infantry, by its noise and suddenness, would often result in the loss of the fish, through the agitation of the rod-holder at the critical moment.

Still, if you were alone, it was a bridge worth lingering on in the daytime. At night it was certainly awkward, as we have shown; as old Martha, the gossiping old crone of the village, would listen if she caught a sound, and make her grandson a

party to her propensities, by exclaiming, as soon as she was satisfied as to the cause thereof, 'Who be that at the bridge, Jem? the crackers be agoin' off tremenjus!' And the base boy, after going out by the shed, would impart the result to the aged one, who repeating it to Matilda, 'the shop' would have it, and the delinquents be exposed.

But it was a pretty bridge for all that; for it was a rough red sandstone one, and crumbledy; and mosses grayed it, and ivy greened it, and spleen-worts purpled it, and ferns grew on the ledges and grasses in the stones; and there were brambles in the crevices, and flood-lodged plants in the joinings; in fact, it was an untidy-looking bridge, and hence picturesque.

And its banks were coloured with forget-me-nots, and massed with burdocks; and the white blossoms of the bindweed, and the pink of the wild roses, clung together and

clustered there. And there were shallows of golden sand that you could look down on from the parapet, and see the shadows of the trout there, as they poised motionless above them, or darted into the holes in the bank when you flipped the mortar off with your finger from between the stones, to startle them as it dropped.

Under the bridge too, at the bottom, were some large slabs, with trails of dank weed clinging to them, and lifting its lengths to the water. And the red showed through the white of the foam, and the stones split the current and drove it; and the swallows just dipped with their wings, and made little light circles about it. And you saw the blue distant hills up the river, and down it the sheep-walks and woods, where it wound under banks in deep shadow, or rippled along through the meadows, and made silver gleams next the green.

And the sky that had been so gray all

the morning was now golden; and as the last gleams of the sun flashed across the tree-tops in the avenue at Boscabel, lighting up the oaks and reddening the fir boughs, Wells, who had been calling at the mill, came up between the paddocks, and riding slowly on over the purple shadows, looked at the horses.

The old man was there too, old William; and, as a matter of course, he was full of information as to his young master, Mr. Charles, and well primed and ready for any occasion which should offer to impart it. And as he soon found that all Wells knew of the matter was from what he had seen in the papers, the old fellow did not miss the chance for a gossip.

‘Is, sir,’ said he, ‘blood ool show itself. He comes o’ the oud stock, sir, as fought for King Charles, when—’

‘Yes,’ said Wells, shutting him up in time, ‘I have heard of it.’

‘O, sir,’ said old William, ‘theer be a dale o’ blood in ’em; an’ our young maister shows it. He be a good un, he be, sir,’ said he; ‘an’ he be ’andy wi’ his fisties too, sir; and that be alleys a good sign o’ a true un. Not that he be quarrelsome-loike, sir; but when it be asked for, they can have it. Loike t’other daay, sir. Theer were a whipper-snapper sort o’ a fellar, wi’ some hair o’ his lip, as were down by the mill a-fishin’; an’ our Mary, sir, that be my niece—her be a prettyish sort o’ gal, you know, sir,’ said the old man, ‘an’ risin’ sixteen—her were a-watchin’ on him, an’ a-standin’ close by, innercent-like; when, darn me, sir, if the birch-broom o’ a fellar daynt think her were taken wi’ him; an’ he up and cotched hold on her an’ kissed her, an’ made her cry—her be but a young un, sir, an’ timid—an’ then, darn his body, he kissed her to stop her cryin’, and kissed her agin arter that not to cry; an’ so, sir, as it were agin her

will, an' a stranger, her didna loike it. Well, sir,' continued Will, 'as her comes up to the bridge, the young maister comes over it. "Why, Mary," says he, sir—he be werry partial to our Mary, sir, be Maister Charles — "who's been a-puttin' you about? You looks as if you'd been a-cryin'; what be the matter ooth you?" So then he draws it out on her, sir. "Indade," says he, when her'd teld him; "I ool just goo down an' see what he has to saay for hisself." So he went down, sir; an' Mr. Whipper-snapper sings out, "O, indade; an' who the'" —you'll excuse me, sir, a' mentionin' his name — "are you, I'd like to know?" An' wi' that he sauced him. Well, sir, our Maister Charles he dunna like sauce; so he says, "If you get interfering ooth the girl agin"—'cos her had to go back that awaay, sir, arter her'd bin to the shop—"I'll put you into the river, rod an' all." So the squirrel-tail, sir, got

saucer still, an' got the maister's monkey up; so says Maister Charles, "Put your rod down, you varmint, an' take a thrashin'. It'll tache you manners, an' do you good;" an' wi' that, sir, he leathered him; an' in two minutes, sir, my gentleman had had enough on it. An' while he were a-growlin' about what he'd do, an' ood ha' the law on him, up comes Mary, sir; 'ecos her were obligated to goo that waay, sir, as her'd done her errand—three ounces o' tay, an' a pound o' short sixes, sir, an' a bit o' snuff for the grandmother—so Maister Charles says to him, sir, "Now, look here, my fine fellar, here be the gal, an' as you dunna seem to o' had enough on it, tell her you be sorry, or I'll pitch you in the river; an' you mun gie her a shillin' too, to buy her a new cap for towslin' on her;" an' he did so; but he warn't long, Mary said, arter that afore he were round the corner, an' his rod ooth him.

' So you see, sir,' said old Will, 'when I

heard o' the maister, I knowed it were true; as if he'd put hisself about in that awaay for a poor girl, why he'd put his mare an' hisself about for a rich un, as ool live to be our young missis some daay, I hopes, sir, plase the Lord, as I reckuns her be a beauty. I'se sid her.'

'Yes, I believe she is nice-looking, William,' said Wells; 'but I don't know as to the rest. I fancy he is like myself, a confirmed old bachelor.'

'No fear, no fear, sir,' said William; 'it'll come true one o' these daays, mind me if it dunna. Ah, sir, he be a sharp un, be Maister Charles; but he conna desave an old mon loike me. Look you here, sir,' said he; 'what do he goo a-talkin' to the Welshman for as come by ooth the drove, to pick him up "two good-looking ponies," small uns, Welsh uns; an' what be he a-tryin' a new bay horse wi' the side-saddle for, sir, if theer wanna somethin' agate? An' what be the

use o' the mountain ponies if they aynt to be broke, an' theer be chilthren to put on 'em?

'I dunna moind,' said the old fellow, 'a-tellin' you, sir, 'ecos you be a gintleman; but it be a woife an' twins—if so be, at laste, it be a good year o' nuts, an' double uns—as he be a-lookin' forward to, that be what it be, sir, mark my words;' and the old man chuckled at his knowingness, and stocked the road with renewed vigour. 'O, she be a werry nice young ooman by all accounts, sir,' continued he, 'an' quite the lady.'

'So I understand,' said Wells; 'but as to marrying, I don't think, William, that has entered his thoughts yet.'

'Ah, he be a sly un, he be, be Maister Charles; but mum's the word, sir,' said William; 'for here he be, a just lookin' the colts over a bit.' And as he spoke Charlie spied Wells, and came on down the avenue to meet him.

‘You are late, Harry,’ said he, as they went up to the house, for Wells had promised to come early, so as to look round a bit.

‘Yes, I am, Charlie,’ he replied; ‘but there was a sale on up our way, at the Bannot Farm; and as I wanted a couple of Alderneys for the pasture next the house, I went.’

‘Did you buy?’ said Charlie.

‘I did,’ said Wells; ‘two nice-coloured ones. There were some Scotch there too, prime West Highland ones, that went for a lot of money. Well, how are you, old fellow, after your gallop? I saw it in the papers. An escape for both of you.’

‘Yes, confound them,’ said Burton; ‘a simple incident, but made sensational. The next time they put me in the papers, I hope they will say less about me.’

‘Unless, Charlie,’ said Wells, ‘it should be such an occasion that they would be

obliged to say more. There are rumours, you know, that you are tired of bachelor life.'

'Don't believe them, Harry,' said Charlie, as the groom touched his hat and took the horse to the stables. 'My mother is away,' said he, 'on a visit, so you must excuse shortcomings. Come in!'

And they went on up-stairs to see some photographs that Charlie had had taken of his colts. And the room they went into was 'Charlie's own room,' as his mother called it—his 'snuggery;' where brushes, hunting-horns, dog-collars, whips, and sporting pictures, both in oil and water, hung on the walls; and guns and fishing-rods were in the corners; and various odds-and-ends and books and papers littered the room.

'What did you do that day?' said Harry Wells, while they were waiting for the other comers.

‘Not much,’ said Burton. ‘We drew the Home Wood, as you saw, no doubt, but failed to find; when just as Will was drawing off with hounds, a Tally O! was heard down at the end, where were some rushes by an old pool-tail. Some man had walked a fox up that hounds drew over. So then Will rattled him; but the people mobbed him, and he could not bolt. At length he went; and though the fellows there shied hats and caps, he made his way and pierced the line, and dropped down for the meadows.’

‘A game fox that,’ said Wells.

‘He had no choice,’ said Charlie; ‘it got too hot for him. Well, the din was awful; but hounds soon settled to the scent and went it. Do you know that country?’

‘Just round Coombe Hill I do,’ said Wells; ‘but not much farther.’

‘We ran from there,’ said Burton, ‘and in a line with it, to Brinksty Gorse, a thick-

ish patch of over sixty acres, bordered by fir plantations at the sides. Through this they pushed him on to low-lying ground, where the top was ant-tumps, and the bottom rushes; so we had to pick it,' said he; 'and thence to meadows that still were sloppy from the recent floods; the river winding through them for some miles. The fox went through it, and the hounds swam over. A cattle-bridge, a swing one, being handy, we tabbered over it and got to hounds, and then came "grief."

'Soddened and wet, the ground was very heavy, and the taking off as bad, and right before us was a line of rails, and no way out but that. I slipped along a ridgy bit,' said Charlie, 'and did it; a dry take off; but Harris went below—John Harris of the Fen—where, being flat, it was as bad as any bog, so he came down; and Dacent caught a top rail, and so got hit hard on the nose; and some one else—I did not look to see

who was the victim—came down not far from me a perfect thud, in sound a stopper. Jenkins was by me, so we had a race over a yawning bank, with ditch for drop; I first,' said Charlie. 'He did it though, and well. Then came a grip, and that we did, and very decently. Then some light fences; then a gorsy common—hounds running well, and pretty well together—that stretched to woods that hung upon the hills; and there we checked. So most of them got up.

'Well,' continued Burton, 'we threaded through the gorse and by the pools; gipsies and donkeys getting in the way. "Get on," cried Will, "and well thong those Jerusalems;" and George, who was behind us rating hangers, came forward at a canter. "Their beastly hoofs will cripple half the pack; they're brutes at hounds," said he. Free from the gorse and past the turf beyond, we reached the woods; and then we found him.

'The fox had gone straight for the

woods, as we all thought at first, but sheep had stopped the scent; so running hard we went out at the end, pointing for Aynsley hills, where in a green lane that we crossed with hounds, I saw Miss Mills, who there was fighting with her little bay, that flecked with foam, and furious he was held, was trying all he could to unseat his rider. You know the rest,' said Charlie.

'It seemed that after we found,' said he, 'instead of going home, as she promised, they had been jogging on quietly—she and the groom—just merely on the listen, thinking that hounds might turn, as we were running dead against the wind, and so give her a gallop in the lanes, as they went home again; and when hounds slewed round and bore along towards them, the bay got wild—hearing their crash and coming—and hence the race; a lucky race for her.'

'It was,' said Wells; 'thanks to your

good mare, Charlie. The nearest shave I think I ever heard of.'

'Don't let us talk of it,' said Charlie, 'now; for when I think of it, it makes me creep. 'Twas awful, Harry!'





CHAPTER X.

THE BACHELOR'S PARTY AND THE DOCTOR'S STORY.

ALL came to dinner but the Aynsley doctor, and he came after; a case detained him; and he found them at their wine, and very merry. Of course the chatter turned upon the race; but seeing Charlie shirked it, they did not press it. But during the evening some remark was made that recalled an incident connected with it.

It seemed that when they were at the station, a brawny navvie, with a clay-stained shirt, came up just as the car was leaving, and claimed acquaintance with the doctor, Clifton, who then shook hands with him. Seeing Charlie smile, the doctor said, 'A

friend; I will tell you all about him some day, Burton; for thereby hangs a tale.'

'So, doctor,' said Charlie, 'may I, without offence, ask you a question?'

'Yes; fifty if you like,' said Mr. Clifton.

'Well, who's your fat friend, the man who claimed acquaintance at the station? You said you would tell me some fine day or other.'

'O, the navvie,' said the doctor; 'I saw you smile. His name is Dosset, a railway ganger, and an old acquaintance. I had not seen him—O, for many years; but it seems that he still follows his old calling. Having a railway contract up the country, he is down here seeking "hands." I told him,' said the doctor, 'to call round upon the morrow, and have a talk about old times and things.'

'A queer name that of Dosset?' Burton said.

'Turbill or Turbeville is his real name,'

said Mr. Clifton; 'but they call him Dosset, as he says, "for short," being a Dorsetshire man. He was head ganger to a lot of navvies.'

'And how came you to know him?' Charlie said.

'By his giving me a lift in early days,' was the reply.

'He! he give you a lift!' said Charlie, with astonishment.

'Yes, Burton,' said the doctor, 'he! He did it too; but to explain how would make a long tale of it; so I will not now inflict it on you or on these gentlemen, as it would not particularly interest any of you.'

However, pressed to do so by those present, he at length complied, and it was to this effect:

That after passing the College he settled in the West of England, at Witford, a small manufacturing town, full of sharp turns, steep pitches, and with plenty of

machinery; all of which he thought likely to bring in patients.

Taking a corner house through the suggestion of his old governor—‘When you settle, sir, take a “corner”—a good direction, and fractures likely’—he waited day after day the incoming of his first patient, but the only one who did come was an old woman for a few cough pills; but still it was ‘a patient,’ and they were duly and on the spot entered in a large day-book. However, one patient followed another; but they were not of much account, and grist to the mill was badly wanted.

Near to the town a new line of railway was in course of construction; but the other surgeons had secured the contracts for attendance upon the men. When one evening as he was down in the dumps, and half regretting having a lease of his house—for he had done very little and had only had one ‘decent accident,’ as he said, since he came—

he saw by the paper that the long viaduct was shortly to be commenced; and he fancied he saw daylight.

The next night too, Saturday, was, it seemed, 'pay night' with the navvies; that he knew from the other surgeons; and the house where they paid, the Mason's Arms, was but three miles or so from the town; so he thought he would go there and see the ganger, and possibly something might turn up. So he went, nasty night though it was; and turning up the collar of his pilot, he jogged along through the mud and rain, for he had not yet commenced to keep a horse, not seeing his way clearly to the use of one.

On reaching the place he found he had to go further, three miles on, as they had 'shifted their pay-house,' so he was half inclined then and there to turn back again; but the thought that something might result that would be of use to

him impelled him onwards, and he at length arrived at the house tired out.

The name of the place was the Dog and Duck, and a queer-looking place it was; being the half of a ruined old house, that was patched up into an ale-house, and dignified by the title of 'inn;' and there was a queer lot there also. Resenting his entrance as an intruder, and finding that they considered the place for that night as their club-room, he pacified them by ordering in some ale for them when he ordered something warm for himself; as he had a consciousness of having caught a very large cold in the venture. So lighting a Manilla, and settling down in as unconcerned a manner as he could assume, he looked round him, and scrutinised the company.

In the room, and sitting round the fire, were some forty or fifty navvies, bare-throated, bare-armed, and brawny; with clay-stained clothes and muddy boots. With

them were half a dozen hang-dog-looking fellows, in rusty velveteen jackets, with deep pockets, that bespoke the poacher; and in the corner, fast asleep, was a big black-whiskered man of Herculean build—the ganger, Dosset.

Finding what a set he had dropped into, the doctor wished himself far enough; but the rain was coming down so straight outside, that to face a six-miles' walk until it ceased was out of the question; so he had to make the best of it, and bad was the best. After encountering sundry rebuffs in his attempts to enter into conversation, and having to put up with them, the ganger when he awoke, began to get rusty, for when he was in drink he was quarrelsome; and he asked, or rather demanded, his business. So he told him; and that if, when the extra men were put on, they required a doctor, if they liked to send to him, he would do his best for them; the contracts

of the other surgeons being for different portions of the line.

Seeing that the doctor was fidgety at the close proximity of some dogs to his heels, the woman who was waiting on them, an over-dressed and brassy-looking personage, ordered the poaching-looking fellows to 'shift them;' so the dogs were kicked out, as the men knew she would make them go themselves if they were not. She was the wife of the landlord, one Robert Bingham, familiarly known as Bob Binks; a man who had been abroad at his country's expense, and who gave the place a worse name than even his predecessor; in fact, as the doctor found afterwards, it was the resort of all the scamps in the neighbourhood.

But it will here be better to let the doctor tell the tale himself.

'When I told him I was a doctor,' said Mr. Clifton, "'You be!" cried he, consider-

ably astonished, and scrutinising me from head to foot—"Gammon!"'

'That was a nasty one,' said Burton.

"Fact," said I. "My name is Clifton—Clifton of Witford, 26 Gresham-road, the corner house, well known and easy to find."

'The black-whiskered one,' said he, 'eyed me suspiciously, took a few whiffs at his pipe, and then laying it down, began with the greatest deliberation to take off his coat; he being almost the only one who had not removed it. This proceeding, uncertain of what was coming, I viewed,' said the doctor, 'not without some inward fear of the action of that splendid biceps of his being speedily brought into play upon my person.'

"Now, then," said he, stripping up his sleeve, and still keeping his eyes fixed upon me, "if you be a doctor, you can tell what's been the matter with my arm; and if you

bain't, why we'll give you 'one for luck' for telling lies." '

'Pleasant, certainly,' said Charlie.

'What that "one" was,' said Mr. Clifton, 'was too evident; but before I could reply, a big brawny fist was presented right in my face, with the sharp stentorian cry of "Catch hold!"

'As,' continued the doctor, 'the wisest course with a half-drunken giant like that, and with helpmates round him, was to grin and bear it, I set my teeth, and clutched the limb.

'Grasping it firmly, and with some difficulty tracing the bone through the mass of muscle that covered it, I found,' said the doctor, 'that it had been fractured at its middle third; and judging from the amount of "callus"—new bone, Burton—perceptible to the touch, I surmised that he had not long been able to use it. "Broken arm here," said I, catching him tightly at

the point in question. "Wrong," cried he; "you're out of it!" "I am not only not out of it," I quietly said, "but I will make a near guess how long it is since you did break it." "You will?" said he. "Yes," I said. "It is not less than six weeks, and not more than eight." "Well, I'm blowed but you've hit it!" was the reply. "It's just seven weeks to-morrow."

'While engaged in this examination,' said the doctor, 'the men had thronged round us, and were now evidently bent on also putting my knowledge to the test. As the ganger resumed his seat, one of the velveteens came up, and put out his hand, on the back of which was a projection, that I at first thought was a bursa; but which, on examining, I found to be a partial dislocation of the os magnum—one of the bones, Burton. "Bone out; done fighting, eh?" I asked. The man, smiling, slunk off without replying; one of his companions ob-

serving, "Hillo, Jem, how about the keeper?"

'Arms were then held out, backs of heads presented, and legs stuck upon the table; their respective owners all talking at once, and clamouring for information.

'Being now well in for it,' continued the doctor, 'I saw that my only plan was to try to seem good-humoured, and to put up with it. "What's this, mister?" said one, baring a puffy knee, and bringing his heel down with a bang upon the table, that made him wince again, and showed me symptoms of approaching synovitis. "Why, you have got inflammation of the joint," I said; "and if you don't rest it and shirk the drink, you will have a mess with it." "There, now, I told you so; but you'll never be ruled," said the ganger. "Here, feel my leg; how long is it since I broke it?" was asked by another, one of the roughest. "Ay, tell him, and then you shall have

a guess at my ribs," said a third. "And my foot," said a fourth. "Really, my good fellows," said I, for I began to feel far more nervous at passing their examination than I did in my examination at the College—and no wonder, with that "one" in store for me if I failed—"it is impossible to tell you how long ago you have been hurt! You may just as well expect me to inform you if the man in the moon has been vaccinated, and whether he has had the measles. If you will ask me what is the matter with you, I will tell you."

'However, it was in vain,' said the doctor, 'that I remonstrated; and I had to get through it as well as I could; a lucky guess in most instances favouring me as to time.'

'I had now examined nearly every man there,' said he, 'and had made lucky shots with most of them; but there were a few half-drunken fellows who still were doubt-

ful, because I could not tell how long it was since Bill Hayes broke his ribs; and it was "not more than seven years ago." If I were a real doctor, said they, I could have told them. Confound the wretches, I thought, let them go to the deuce! It serves me perfectly right for submitting to be schooled by such a set of brutes. But then the rain still came down, and if I only could get elected as their surgeon, it might be a good stepping-stone; so,' said the doctor, 'I set my teeth harder than ever, and waited till the rain ceased.

'How it would have ended,' said he, 'is hard to say, for I was getting rather savage, and out of patience; but at this juncture in came the landlord, the renowned Bob Binks, dripping wet as to his coat, but dry under. "Glad to see you, sir," said he, after looking at me a time or two, "seed you afore, sir; know'd you again directly." He was a red-nosed, pimple-faced, long-waistcoated indi-

vidual,' said the doctor, 'whose remarkably short legs, and peculiarity of vest, gave you the idea that the coppers he was so constantly diving after, came out of his knees. "Thank you," said I, replying to him; "I was not aware of it." "O yes," said he; "I was the man as helped to bring that gentleman in, sir, as was hurt at the corner." "What, Gibson?" said I. "Yes, sir," said he; "I'd come to Witford that morning to see some men, and he passed me in the street, going at a most awful pace; and bang he had it against the wall, and over he went a good un! The horse was dead, and the trap was in smithereens; so I picked him up, sir, and brought him in." "Ah," said I,' continued Mr. Clifton, "'he put his shoulder out, and dislocated his wrist. I wondered he had not broken it." "My eyes, sir," said the fellow, "didn't you just put him right though soon? Quickest thing I'd seen, and I'd seen a few;" and he pro-

ceeded to give a glowing account of my skill and quickness; answering the doubting ones by remarking, that "if he warn't a real doctor, he couldn't ha' done it!"

'That settled it,' said the doctor; 'so as the rain then ceased, and the ganger was half asleep, I left; with a sort of half admission that perhaps they "might" send to me, but still nothing definite.

'A week afterwards, however,' said he, 'one of the men had a heavy truck pass over his foot while he was at work, and the ganger, who was by at the time, sent for me. I jumped into a car, and lost no time about it; dressed the foot—which, strange to say, was not broken, Burton—fraternised with the ganger, and returned full surgeon-in-ordinary to the navvies aforesaid.'

'Tally O! hark forrard! yoicks, yoicks! Tally O!' shouted Charlie; and their glasses clinked musical honours for the victory.

'Well, that started me,' said the doc-

tor, laughing. 'In a few weeks afterwards, they commenced the long viaduct, and increased their number of men to two hundred and forty. As the works proceeded, several accidents occurred, for it was a dangerous place; and by some mysterious means, my name frequently appeared in the papers—'

'You did not know how, of course?' said Burton, smiling.

'Giving me in a short time plenty of notoriety, to which I soon added increased popularity; for the navvies—really a decent set, rough as they were—did not fail to tell others their opinion of me; and the ganger, Dosset, when we came thoroughly to know each other, proved to be one of the best-hearted men I ever met with; in fact,' said the doctor, 'to his incessant, but really honest, praise of me to all he met with, I may safely say the greater part of my practice was really due.'

‘Quite a trump card!’ said Burton.

‘Yes,’ said the doctor, ‘he was. I soon bought a horse; and in six months,’ said he, ‘I bought another, for I had then full work for two.

‘Well, I stayed there, Burton, ten years; and then, having in the mean time settled—you know my wife, I think?—I decided, as my circumstances were somewhat altered, to take it quietly, and try to blend a little relaxation with work. So I sold my practice, came to Aynsley, and here I am; spinning you a long yarn about Dosset, and how I got my appointment, and who were my examiners. Burton, your health,’ said the doctor. ‘Gentlemen, your good health.’ And, glad he had finished his say, Mr. Clifton attacked the walnuts.

‘I think,’ said he, after they had laughed over his adventure, ‘that a long speech like that is worth a song in return.’

‘Decidedly,’ said Burton.

‘Then will you give us one?’ said the doctor.

And seeing that he was in for it, Charlie, with his musical voice, plunged at once into ‘Philip the Falconer.’





CHAPTER XI.

THE PEYTON ARMS—PAST AND PRESENT.

‘JOHNSON,’ said Archer, as they were busy amongst the paint-pots at Hazelwood, a few days after Charlie’s bachelor’s party, ‘I vote we turn out now, old fellow, for I deserve a holiday. I consider that I have done a very fair morning’s work; and these hounds are coming out so satisfactorily, that I think,’ said he, ‘two days more will finish them. So when you have finished touching up those heads, if you like we will start.’

‘All right, any time you like,’ said Johnson, as he laid down his crayon, and handed the sheet to Archer, with ‘Which of those comes best, John, the centre one or the top one?’

‘Well,’ said Archer, scrutinising the

heads upon it, 'they are all like Rose, but I think that is the best one,' said he, pointing to the one in the centre. 'But don't you Greuze it too much now, or you will spoil it. A face like hers, Johnson, does not want idealising. Nature has done enough for her; so be satisfied. Come, then,' said he, taking 'Will and the Hounds' off the easel, and putting it down face to the wall, 'let us be off. Will you bring your block—you might get something perhaps?'

'Yes, I think I will,' said Johnson; 'but where are you going to?'

'Well, up to the village first,' said Archer, 'to the Peyton Arms; and then, wherever you like afterwards. I want to see the landlord there. He sent to ask Brandon if he could manage to "turn in" for him from Saturday to Monday, as he is short of room himself. He has a drove of Welsh cattle and some horses coming through for the fair, and he can manage the

horses, but not the cattle; so he wants to tack them in here, as they could pick them up as they come by; so I must see him, and know what he offers.'

'Very well,' said Johnson; 'anywhere; it is all the same to me.'

So the brushes and colours were put aside, and they started. The general aspect of the village has been described, and the Peyton Arms stood at the entrance to it.

'Where is your master?' said Archer to one of the men at the door, as they came up to it, after a two miles' walk by the brook and the meadows.

'He be gone to the parson's, sir. His pigs be pounded,' said the man.

'And how long will it take to tell him about the pigs?' said Archer.

'Depends what he axes him to have, sir,' was the reply. 'If summut "short," he'll soon put it down; but if it be in a jug, he'll hang at it.'

‘Well, how long do you suppose?’ said Archer.

‘Conna saay,’ said the fellow; ‘not a moighty whoile maybe, sir, ’ecos he oona miss his tay, an’ that be at four.’

‘Well, let us take a turn round,’ said Archer; ‘I hate these places, Johnson, and we cannot go in without having something.’

‘That will suit me, John, exactly,’ said Johnson.

So they left, and went up through the village, Johnson spying any quantity of good material in the half-timbered houses and cottages, and lots of models: sun-tanned, shock-headed, ‘Hunt’-looking youngsters, artistically ragged, and with ‘grandfeyther’s’ clothes on, cut to fit them; and juveniles of both sexes, booked by him for a future day. And then, turning to the right at the top of the village—Coombe Hill—beyond the big elm, they crossed into the fields, to take in the surroundings and

the back buildings; and so returned to the inn through the stable-yard, where Johnson had his eyes on a 'bit' at once; a portion of the older building, left as it was when the front was faced, and valuable for the good form and colour it possessed, in the shape of projecting gables, mossed tiles, and stained plaster-work.

'So,' said Johnson, 'you go in, Archie, and do what you have to do; and I will camp here and get this.' So Archer went.

'He is not yet returned,' said Archer, as he came back; 'so we must wait a bit. Perhaps when you have finished your sketch, and put in that good-looking girl who is at the window, he will be. It comes well, old man,' said he.

'Now, Mary,' said an old fellow, who was at the back of them, a 'helper' there, and who was watching the process, 'you goo on wi' your broom; youn had your pictur took afore, you know, an' you ought to be

satisfied. Her were took last week, sir,' said the man, explaining, 'by a gentry sort o' a man, as were a-takin' off that oud bit, as you be doin' on, sir; her stuck herself in the windey, sir, an' now her thinks to be took agin.'

'Never mind him, Mary,' said Johnson; 'you are a pretty girl, and I will put you in;' words that caused Mary to blush and vanish.

'Now, stupid,' said the fellow to a lad who was looking on, 'right them gears on the filler, ool you? Darn the lads, how they does bother a body! Theyse no more braaines than Daft John, who sowed needles to grow iron bars, and ood' strut like a crow i' the gutter about it. An' be you in this part o' the country, sir?' said he, turning to Archer.

'You see I am, don't you?' was the reply.

'An' how be the young lady and Mais-

ter Eddut, at the Graange, sir? I hanna bin theer a merciful long whoile.'

'O, quite well, quite well. What do you know about it?' said Archer.

'Well, sir, I oughter kneow,' said the fellow; 'I worked for your feyther, sir.'

'You did?' said Archer. 'How long ago? He has been dead some years.'

'Is, sir, he has; and so has Mayster George; him as were i' the Guards in Lunnun, sir; an' a foine-grown chap he were too.'

'Yes,' said Archer; 'George died before I left school, and Harriet.'

'Ay, her were a nice young ooman too, sir. You an' her, sir, used to run me roun' the shrubbery, when I'd purtend to cut awaay wi' the rabbits. I did the walks an' the borders, sir, when you was that high, sir,' said the man, stooping down, with his hand a foot from the pitching. 'I lived about theer then, sir.'

‘And what is your name, my man?’ said Archer.

‘Todd, sir,’ was the reply. ‘Tom Todd “the foighter,” it used to be, sir; but them good oud days be gone, sir.’

‘And a good thing too,’ said Archer.

‘I were one o’ the javelin-men, sir—thirty on us—when your feyther were High Sheriff, sir; an’ my feyther were ditto to his feyther—your grandfeyther, sir—a good-sorted oud man he were too, sir; an’ I went wi’ him to the ‘Sises.’

‘You did?’ said Archer.

‘Is, sir,’ replied Todd, ‘an’ ooth the trumpeters, sir, o’ the Sunday, to the ‘thedral. An’ arter sarvis, sir, we went up to the jaail to see the prisoners through the bars. That were the oud jaail, sir, as be tooked down now, sir; an’ the two men as were gwain to be hung for horse-staling; but the jaailer didna come among us wi’ the boot for ha’pence, for showin’ on ‘em, loike he did in

my feyther's toime. I dayn't see 'em turned off though; for the daay they was hung I had to goo to the pits for coal for the mays-ter; that were him at the farm, sir, Squoire Danby, as be dead now; an' the team rund awaay, as they all said were a judgment on him for not lettin' me goo to see the soight. Theer were a maany hung in them days, sir; a great maany.'

'So I believe,' said Archer. 'How are you getting on, Johnson?' said he, looking over his shoulder. 'Yes, it will make a sketch.'

'Is, sir,' continued the fellow; 'poor Jem Hood got it then too; seven year, sir, to Bottomey Baay—that were wheer they sent 'em to then, sir—for leatherin' Moike Passy.'

'And what had Mike Passy done that he had to be "leathered"?' said Archer.

'Why, sir, for one thing,' said Todd, 'he'd hid his bits and bridles i' the tallet,

an' put the curb-chaain i' the corn-bing—he were groom, sir, and t'other were wag-oner — o' purpose to throw Jem late o' huntin' mornin', which it did, sir, and set the mayster swearin'; which in course he were obligated to do, as a-puttin' of him about, sir, up one soide and down the t'other; an' Jem didna loike it. So he says, says he—because, sir, the mayster had stopped 'em a toime or two a-wranglin' an' a-foightin' i' the rick-yard, or behind the kid-poile—“Just you stop, my lad o' wax, till we goos in for Lawless, an' then I'se have it out wi' you.”

‘And who was Lawless?’ said Archer.

‘Lawless, sir? he were a hour, he were, sir,’ said Todd, ‘as we alleys had when we went into the town the daay the High Baay-liff were 'lected; they dayn't have none o' them Mares in them daays, sir. You see, sir,’ said he, ‘the oud un were off an' the new un wern't on, by rayson o' his havin' to

be swored in; so as a sorter trate, an' to git the payple loike him, he used to gie 'em a hour — that were fro' twelve to one, sir — to divart theirselves, and jist do as they loiked, sir; as much as to saay, sir, "Goo it, my boys; theer be no law now!"'

'Don't let us hinder you,' said Archer, who did not seem particularly interested in the doings.

'No harm done, sir,' said the fellow; 'I be a-waaitin' for mayster.'

So there was no help for it, as they could not order him off, but to let him wind himself up at his leisure. So finding he was not interrupted, he continued; putting in a word of admiration now and then, as Johnson sketched the building, and brought it out bit bý bit.

'An' we used to goo it, sir.'

'What, fight?' said Archer.

'In coorse,' said Todd. 'Why, you oodna ha' had us miss the chance, ood

you, sir? But we pelted first, an' fit arter-wards.'

'Pelted?' said Archer.

'Is, sir; wi' opples, loike mad! The towns-folk agin we folk; the commoners agin the gentry. All the windies was took out o' the houses i' the High-strate, sir, so as they shouldna be broken, to stan back i' their rooms, an' pelt us.

'Well, sir, afore the hour were up, we alleys began to settle our little differences by a friendly foight, as put us square-loike to start agin; an' then, as the clock struck one, we stopped leatherin' each other, so as to pitch into the specials—that were the special constables, sir—an' that were the crame o' the puddin', that were; 'ecos if we didna get theer staffs, we soon had theer sticks—long uns, sir, as they held i' theer hands i' the front of 'em, to maake a road loike for the gentry. So then we had sum-mut to foight wi'.

“Now,” says Moike, as he throwd his cap i’ the air, as soon as we was tired o’ peltin’—he were a Irishman, he were, sir, leastways his mother were—“horoo for a foight, my lads. Come,” says he, “an’ have your leatherin’, Jem, loike a man!” An’ at it they went, sir. Well, sir, whether it were Moike were toired—for he’d been havin’ a free foight wi’ his friends, instead o’ peltin’, as bein’ better sport—or Jem were the best man, I dunnow; howsomever, Jem licked him; and the last roun’ he had he went down o’ the dollup; and he didna foight not no more. So his payple got drunk over him that noight, an’ made a very pretty wake on him, sir; an’ they buried him dacently when the time come.’

‘Why, God bless me,’ said Archer, turning sharp round on him, ‘you don’t mean to say he killed the man?’

‘O no, sir,’ said Todd, ‘he didna kill him; but arter the last toime loike he rund

agin Jem's fisties, he never didna spake not no more.'

'Did they hang the vagabond for it?' said Archer.

'In coorse not, sir! No,' said Todd; 'they said it wern't worth more nor seven year, as it were only slaughter; an' he were aggerawated to do it. So he went to Bottomey, sir; an' iver since he comed back—he works at the quarry up yonder, sir; he be a loime-stacker—he's gone by the naame o' "Lawless"—Jem Lawless. But when he comed back,' continued the fellow, 'that game was all up, sir.'

'And quite time for it,' said Archer.

'For what wi' stones when you hadna opples, an' the gooin' it arter the hour, an' arter dark—so as to gie the glaziers a turn, sir, arter the windies was put in—'cos they was very koind to us, sir, an' stood drink for it—theer were such a shindy i' the town, that arter they'd had the yeomanry, an'

oonst the reglars in, two or three years, to quiet us, the Baayliff gie it up, an' oodna let us have not no more on it.'

'I don't wonder at it,' said Archer, as he sharpened the pencil for Johnson.

'So then theer were no chance, sir,' said Todd, 'for them as waanted a foight, 'cept i' the winter, when the morrisers was about—their's the dancers, sir—the boatmen an' bargemen off the Sivern, sir, as comed about wi' ribbins when the frost stopped 'em, an' hit sticks together to the tune whilst they danced. Well, sir, they was rare good hands at a foight, they were; and bein' friendly sort o' chaps, they was willin' to obleege a fellow at any toime; so when we knowd fro' the butterwomen as they was about loike, we ood git a daay off fro' mayster o' "pertickler business," an' goo in, sir; an' by maakin' the best use o' the toime, sir, we generally,' said he, 'got enough foightin' to last us a whoile.'

‘ Friendly, did you say?’ asked Archer.

‘ Quoite friendly, sir,’ replied Todd. ‘ O yes. For as soon as we could well leather our mon, we’d handle him loike a babby, as tender as could be, an’ stan’ cups roun’. O yes, all friendly, sir; no malice, ony we hit hard!’

‘ You liked a fight, then, in your younger days?’ said Archer.

‘ Well, a scrimmage nows and thens, sir, stirrd the blood a bit, and we couldna,’ said he, ‘ git much o’ it in the country; least-ways it were better loike when it were a towns chap, ’ecos them towns chaps, you see, sir, used to taake on theerselves; so we had to tabber ’em a bit to keep ’em in boun’s.’

‘ And did they not come from town to “ tabber” you, as you call it?’ said Archer.

‘ When the Maay-poles was up they did, sir,’ said Todd; ‘ but they be tooked down now, sir, all but that theer one o’ the hills,

wheer the shingley spoire be, an' the road inds. "Ind o' the World" we calls it, sir; no road in it don't goo nowheer; they all stops theer.'

'Do you mean the hamlet of Endall?' said Archer.

'That be him, sir,' said Todd; 'wheer theer be a big green, an' a pound, an' a pool i' the road by an old farmhouse.'

'I never was there,' said Archer, 'but I have heard tell of it.'

'Well,' continued Todd, 'they comed theer a few toimes, sir, but it be a ockard sort o' a plaalice; an' the last toime they got i' the oods, sir, when the drink were in 'em, an' the owls theer well-noigh frightened 'em to death; so they didna come agin.

'So it be werry taame nowadays, sir, an' me an' the young folk—moi sons be faamous foighters, sir—we only goos 'ecos the parson up theer, who's one o' the old sort, sir, an' "a true blue," says it a rellit

o' old toimes, an' he'll keep it up. So he gies us a trate, sir; an' he foinds the flowers, an' we drinks his health and dances o' the green; but as he oona let we foight, it be poor sport, sir; an' if it werena for the chance o' a bit o' up-an'-down as the youngsters has i' the dingles, amongst theerselves loike, as we comes home, we shouldna goo; but they foights their best, an' we sends the cap roun' for 'em.'

'But don't you think that all that fighting is very brutal?' said Archer.

'Brutal, sir?' said Todd. 'Well, I don't rightly know the manin' on it; but if it be your gentry name for noice, sir, it be brutal, very brutal indeed, sir. That be why I loikes it.'

'Exactly,' said Archer; 'so I thought, Todd.'

'Now then,' said the fellow, shouting to a man in the road, who stopped to look at them, 'what be you a-starin' at? Goo on,

Crocky, or I'll gie you kellums;' and the man went on with a growl.

'What in the world is "kellums"?' said Archer, laughing, as the truck-load of crockeryware vanished round the corner.

'Kellums, sir,' said Todd, 'be a larrupin'.'

'O,' said Archer, 'not a leathering, nor a licking, then?'

'No, sir,' said he; 'a larrupin' begins wi' a quilting an' ends wi' a leatherin'; if so be as it be required, sir.'

'I see,' said Archer; 'but why "kellums"?''

'Well, sir,' said Todd, 'when I were in Staffordshire, at the pits theer, we used to goo to Kellums the day they crabbed the parson. It was a little bit o' a chapel-place, down i' a dip o' the hills, wi' a big ood roun' it. An' we used to pelt him wi' crabs fro' his doore to the porch; an' them as owed him a grudge, picked the hardest, so

as to gie it him stiff. An' it were foine fun to see him cut,' said Todd.

'What a singular custom!' said Archer. 'How came that about?'

'Why, sir,' said he, 'the parson one day—whether he'd stole 'em o' the road at a cottage, or whether he'd brought 'em ooth him, to ate i' the vestry, nobody knowd; but he'd got some dumplin's up his sleeve, sir; an' so the tale goos, sir, when he comes to "Let us praay," an' down goos his arms, bang he hits the clerk o' his yud, sir, wi' one of 'em. "Good Lord deliver us," says he, a-mis-takin', as it were, his turn to goo on, an' a-lookin' up at the parson savage, sir. Well, soon arter that, bang he has him agin, with another, jist o' the nape o' his neck, sir; as fetched him up on end immajutely. "Good Lord deliver us," said he agin, an' banged the book o' the cushin, seein' as the folks was a-larfin'.

'Well, sir, that passed,' said Todd, 'when

jist as they was all a-settlin' down loike steady, an' the parson stood up to gie out his text, whack he has him agin, pat o' the cheek. "O," says the clerk, "if that be your game, parson, come on;" an' wi' that, sir, he gies him one atween the eyes wi' a crab—he had a lot on 'em i' his pocket, sir, as he'd picked a-comin', for the chilthren at home to play ooth. An' as long as them crabs lasted, sir, the oud parson got it hot, the payple siding ooth the clerk, an' a-larfin'.'

'A very nice state of things, indeed,' said Archer.

'Is, it were, sir,' said Todd; 'they all said so. Is,' said he, chuckling, 'it were werry noice indade, sir, whoile it lasted, as it were great fun to see him dodge i' the pilpit, an' the crabs a-flyin' loike balls at Waterloo, sir. I'se heerd my feyther saay as a uncle o' hisn were theer, an' sin it, sir. Well, sir,' continued he, 'when the toime comed roun'

agin, that daay next year, the payple thought they'd get the start on him, an' so waaited for him; an' fro' that day to this—well, not 'sackly to this, but I remember it, sir, they used to gie it him koind fro' his doore to the church; an' it were a foine soight to see him cut.

'They do saay though, arter I left that part,' said he, 'to settle in this here quarter, sir, as a new parson as come were cute enough to put a man i' his gownd, to taake the crabbin' for him, while he cut roun' through the bushes—it be ood all roun' it, sir; lies in a hole, as I said, sir—an' got to the church thatawaay; an' that though they all knowd the fellar, they ood purtend not to, an' say, "A butiful sarmunt that were o' Sunday, parson," or "A powerful discoorse you gin us, your revrence," or summut o' that sort, sir, to tan him loike, an' rile him; hittin' him hard, you see, sir, all the toime.

'Ah, them was merry days, them was,

sir! I were a butty-collier then, sir,' said Todd; 'an' I had my dawg, as good a bull-pup as iver were sin, sir, as you could swing roun' by his tayl or his lip, an' he'd niver say O! He were a beauty, sir; an' I baited wi' him i' the bull ring twoice, sir; so you may judge he warn't a bad un.'

'How long shall you be, Johnson?' said Archer impatiently.

'Just finishing, old fellow. He will wind up directly.'

'He seems good for an hour, the wretch!' muttered Archer.

But Todd was slightly deaf, and persevering. 'Ay, sir,' he went on, 'they did awaay wi' it at last, though more's the pity. An' I had my pigeons, sir, as I flew agin the best theer; an' a couple o' cocks, as I fought ooth the spurs on. Them were noble fellars, them were; but they stopped that too i' the ind; an' now,' said Todd, 'ony the gentry be allowed to foight 'em; an' then

ony perwided they has 'em in theer drorin'-rooms, an' on a Sunday, proivate loike, so as not to be a-encouragin' on it among the payple.

'So, you see, sir,' said he, 'they be a-taakin' all our innercint amoosements from us; an' we got nothin' now but our drink an' our fisties, an' the chance o' gettin' took on at the 'lections, to help the foightin' men. But them don't come often, sir; so if it werna for a bit o' gaame-presarvin', we should have but a dull toime o' it, I'se a-thinkin'.'

'Game-preserving?' said Archer. 'What, taken on as keepers?'

'Well, we reckuns to keep, sir, what we does git,' said Todd. 'It be this awaay, you see, sir,' said he. 'If, when we be about the roads, an' a-bowlin' stones for pastime, a oud cock-pheasant or a bird, sir, hits his head agin one, through him a-lookin' about him a-idlin' loike, we presarves him, you see, sir, in case he's a owner; an' if when ween kep

him a bit he seems loikely to goo bad, we puts him i' the pot and ates him ; 'ecos it ood be wrong on us, on any on us, sir, to be a-waastin' o' good food. No petickler harm i' that, I suppose, sir?' said Todd.

'I should think,' said Archer, 'there is harm, and a great deal of harm too, as they are not your property; but if you get caught at it, you will be able to judge for yourself, as I have no doubt a magistrate would give you ample time for reflection.'

'They hanna cotched me it,' grinned the fellow. 'By gom, sir,' said he, walking off, 'here be mayster.'

'What a vagabond it is!' said Johnson, as the fellow turned into the stable.

'Yes,' said Archer; 'it is a good thing that the old easy-going days, and that lax church-going, that half-and-half observance of the Sunday, have disappeared; but luckily there are not many like him round here, Johnson. Bred amongst the pits, he retains

the brutal instincts of the pit people. A bit of poaching is about the worst our own country people are guilty of, and of that it seems quite hopeless to try to cure them. Have you finished?' said he, as Johnson closed the book.

'Yes, quite, John,' said Johnson; 'so now if the landlord is come, the sooner you see him the sooner shall we be home again. I will walk quietly on, if you won't be long.'

'Very well,' said Archer; 'ten minutes will suffice for my business; so I will go round to the bar and overtake you.'

'All right,' said Johnson.





CHAPTER XII.

MARSTON HILLS, AND THE RIDE TO THE LIDDIATS.

‘WELL, then, I suppose we must leave you ladies to take care of yourselves,’ said Andrews, as the horses were brought round to the door, for him and George Oliver to ride to the Liddiats. ‘You know Cissy of old, Miss Oliver, and what a madcap she is; so don’t let her gallop you all over the country, or she will get you into difficulties,’ said he; ‘you and the pony.’

‘Now, Ted, be quiet,’ said his sister. ‘We are quite able to see to ourselves; are we not, Louie?’

‘I should think so,’ said she, ‘and our ponies too. Don’t you think so, George?’

‘I won’t commit myself to any rash

assertion,' said Oliver; 'but I fancy both ponies will suffer before we come back again.'

'There, go along with you,' said his sister, kissing him; 'and mind and be back by tea-time remember, the evening after tomorrow; and don't you be rash and get down, George.'

'Nor you, Teddy,' said Cissy; 'or lose yourself in the woods; because you do that sort of thing occasionally, you know.'

'Spare his feelings, Miss Andrews,' said George. 'I will see that he is properly labelled before he starts, and he shall be returned to you uninjured.'

'Then, on that condition,' said Cissy, 'I will be comforted. Come here, Ted,' said she, 'and be started decently. You take no pride whatever in yourself. There, then,' said she, as she arranged his handkerchief to her satisfaction; 'now you are presentable.'

'Mr. Fox, Mr. Andrews; Mr. Andrews,

Mr. Fox,' said Ted. 'Come along, George; the animals are impatient.'

'Do you know what you have forgotten?' said his sister, calling to him as he mounted. 'You never kissed me!'

'Now, really, did I not?' said Ted. 'Now that is sad! There is nothing hurts a woman's feelings so much, George, as not kissing her when she thinks you are going to; or not being,' said he, 'sufficiently affectionate when you have the chance of it. Can you reach?' said Ted.

'I will try to,' said Cissy.

'Then come here,' said he.

'Now, Ted,' said she, making ineffectual attempts to kiss him, as he edged to the mounting-block, and she stood on it, 'why don't you stoop? You are keeping George waiting.'

'Tiptoe,' said Ted; 'I can't break my back. There, will that do?' said he, as she did so.

‘If you have not another, it must.’

‘There, then,’ said he, as he complied; ‘now be off with you.’ And the two merry girls scampered on to open the gate for them; one of the riders being very glad they were on the road, as he at least was unable to view with calmness even the privileges of a brother; which, considering all things, was not be wondered at.

Then Andrews and Oliver, shaking hands again with their sisters as they passed through it, cantered over the meadows, and were soon splashing along the watery lane on their way from Coney Green.

And with sundry gossipings with the old women up in the gardens, who always came out when there was a splash heard, they threaded the brook, and were soon in sight of the flag at the Court House; and riding by the red-brick house and the ivied house, they turned opposite the steep bank, and passing by the church, left Honeybrook be-

hind them. And as the high elms, that were just greening, showed the gray tower and the old yews through them, and the rooks in the rookery were clamouring about their nests, a bright gleam from the evening sun passed across the meadows, and caught with its radiance the big pool and the river.

Cantering on through the copses and the fields, they reached the dingles, and rode on by the brook-side; as they had decided, as it was such a fine evening, they would go over the Marston Hills, instead of by the road, as the view from there was almost unequalled even in that part of the country.

‘Rattler is fresh this evening,’ said Andrews.

‘Old beans and breed, with an inkling of the morrow,’ said Oliver. ‘He will show them the way, if we find, Ted. Was that Parkes we passed?’ said he.

‘I think it was,’ said Andrews, ‘by the build of his back. He is often up here.’

‘Fly?’ said George.

‘Both,’ said Ted; ‘just as it suits him, or the weather is. But he is oftener at the river, and in the season he sometimes hooks a salmon. He caught a sixteen-pounder once,’ said he. ‘They often get as high as Burford Bridge; and one I heard of weighed, George, twenty-four. We have lots of people up here in the season, who, if they don’t have sport, they get fresh air; for when the fish won’t bite, they climb the hills, to see the views there.’

‘The finest out of Wales,’ said George; ‘that’s certain, Ted. Where else will they get such a sweep of country as that we are coming to — from Marston Hills? If those in town knew half the charms there are all up our valley, they would not, I think, so rush off in summer.’

‘O, bless you, they would all go just the same,’ Ted said. ‘Too much within their reach, George—too close to home—to be the

fashion for such folks to see them. Give me,' said Ted, 'some decent roadside inn, that's cosy, clean, and comfortable, just for head-quarters for the sleep department; and then, a radius of ten miles or so of country such as ours, to do one's eight, ten, twelve, or so of miles per day, or five or six, as different sights might offer. And when you have seen the district, squat again, by pushing on to some fresh dwelling-place. If you should fish, then, George, that's all the better: fresh trout for breakfast, cooked as soon as caught, are not bad things; especially with all those good surroundings of heath and hill, and rock and wood and stream. O George,' said Ted, 'it's jolly! Let those who like catch trains and do hotels, and spoil their pleasure by the rush of it. Give me the country, at least in the summer.'

'Their tempers also, by the cost,' said George. 'I am with you on that point,

Ted, every inch. Suppose we have an out together, Ted, some time in summer, or else in the autumn? We might, I think, get off for a month or so.'

'We will see,' said Andrews.

'The glorious breeze one gets upon our hills,' said George, 'beats though, to my mind, all your Brighton beaches.'

'Barring the briny sniff,' said Andrews; 'we don't get that, that I must own.'

'You get what is far better though than that, than all,' George said—'pure bracing air, that is full of health and strength. None of your smoke and smells, and "How's the wind?" before you know if you can venture out. With miles and miles of open country round you, and I don't know how high above the sea, it would be odd, Ted, were it otherwise. Black smoke we leave to towns; we do not know it.

'Pure air,' said George, 'in mouthfuls,

air always pure, is what we get; and as for sniffs, my boy, wait till the wild-thyme blows, and beans are out, and wafts from hayfields come against your cheeks, flush on a summer day.

‘Look what you have,’ said he; ‘in place of waves and shingle, with black spots—bathers—bobbing up and down, and a line of cliffs and many lines of houses, with scarcely a bit of green to rest your eyes, you get great breadths of bold and wooded country, with greens in masses, whose colour varies as you lie and watch it. A white-waved river, winding as it goes, through cultured land, and tracts of meadow-grass, stealing our country odours on its way. Hills sweeping to great heights,’ said he; ‘then rounding over, down to another valley, just as fine. A mountain-range for distance, and a sky-line broken and varied; and afar, deep blue. No; give me country, Ted.’

‘In summer, George, I grant you,’ he replied; ‘for Honeybrook is so good, and all about it; but in the winter it is different. The brook flower-bordered, and the same when frozen, have not like charms. Beautiful in summer, but when, as in the winter, I have to ford it, and most days, George, breaking the ice as I ride through it, it really is not, I think, quite so pleasant. Still,’ said Andrews, ‘I would not leave it, George.’

‘Ay, spring and summer,’ George said, ‘and autumn too and winter, for I can do with them; each has its beauties, and I love them all. I am something like John Archer, the very quiet of the country to me is charming—now don’t you think so?’

‘Ah, you have lots to do,’ said Ted, ‘and always busy; that makes a difference.’

‘No; I should be just the same,’ said George, ‘had I far less. I like the country. Our smoke is thin, and blue, and shows the trees through, as it steals up through the

orchards, and over the banks to the big woods; and takes the fragrance of the blossom with it, that blends with the scent of the pines, or gets lost on the hills in the heath. I love the country.'

'Well, so do I,' said Ted; 'but a little town life now and then is pleasant, especially in winter.'

'Who,' said George, 'will be there, do you think, to-night, at Freeman's?'

'I really do not know,' Ted said. 'Frank merely said, if I would join some friends for a couple of nights there, and bring you with me, he would find us stable-room, and do us well. So as it would place us nearer to the fixture, I said we would.'

'I am glad we are going,' said Oliver. 'I don't know much about that quarter there. What is your style of fences up that way? You know them?' said he.

'Yes,' said Andrews. 'Frank Freeman and I are old friends; so we see something of

each other. O, stiffish. Ox-rails and double grips, and ins-and-outs; so take care how you come. You will be sure to get them.'

'All right, Ted,' George said. 'A pull for the first, a swing for the second, and a twist for the third; but if you have a rusher, fly the lot. Remember that, Ted, or else you will come to grief.'

'Plain fences suit me best,' said Andrews; 'a quiet pleacher.'

'A sort of fence that always is deceptive. A good pleached hedge will purl you like a wall; turn you right over,' said Oliver, 'unless you slant it. Jumped as the twigs lie, it is a brushy fence; but taken straight,' said he, 'you must be sure to clear it. I have seen some rattling falls, Ted, from low pleached stuff, that a horse jumps lazily, as it looks nothing. Much water?'

'Yes,' was the reply; 'that is, brooks, but they are wide ones; and there also are some stiff bullfinches. Out there too, often tim-

ber-sticks and harrows are left,' said he, 'beneath the hedges, stupidly. That makes it awkward.'

'It does,' said George; 'and therefore, as a rule, I swing my fences—safest no doubt, Ted, for you never know what there is on the drop side. Bullfinches I always go through like a bird,' said he, 'with guard for eyes. Don't, by the bye, if ever you should have one, jump where the fence in the next field joins it—those bits are cornered—for if you do, you have it, bang against the timber. A friend of mine came down an awful rattler through corner-work. He dropped,' said Oliver, 'against the rails, and he and horse turned over; and they lay there. It was many months before he rode again.'

'I don't think I should like them,' Ted remarked.

'No, I don't think you would,' was the reply. 'Until you are sure about your hands

and seat, and nerve—mind that, Ted, nerve—content yourself with either following suit, or taking only what you can look over. To take your own line, and to keep it straight, through a quick thing, with country new to you, requires, if stiffly fenced, a seasoned hand; though those don't always miss the little bits. I got let in myself,' said George, 'the other day.

'I went to Harford. We had,' said he, 'a quick thing there of five-and-fifty minutes, and there were but three up. The rest were nowhere, as most were scattered in the drips and ditches, or catching horses, far enough from hounds. Well, when hounds were running as fast as racehorses, and every man sent side-eyes at his neighbour, we had a bullfincher so high and thick, that where each went through it closed again completely. My mare slipped up a bit,' said he, 'and barely did it; and, hanging, pounded me; for on the drop side was a

line of rails, all down the hedgerow to the very bottom. We dropped within it, and could not get out—caged, most completely. So as the fun was getting rather furious, and those who came through had to come like arrows—the hedge was that strong that it hurled some back—I left the saddle, and screwed in the hedge, under a widish tree there, and pulled the mare close up to me,’ said he.

‘I was not sorry,’ George said, ‘when it all was over; for while it lasted it was a Balaclava, and with lots of shavers too close to be pleasant. I got some company though, for five were down against or over that confounded rail-trap—one broken ribs, and one a damaged shoulder—so I got help. We lost the hounds of course,’ said he, ‘for there we were, and safe; until by working long enough we got a post out, and dropped a rail or two, and so stepped out. The damaged ones we saw to, and went on, but

hounds were gone; and so our day's work was ended.'

'That was Druce and Williams, was it not?' said Ted. 'I heard of it.'

'Yes,' said Oliver; 'we bound up Williams till he could get a doctor—mere broken ribs—he will soon be right again; but Druce,' said he, 'we righted ^{soon} ~~them~~—at least I did.'

'You, George?' said Ted.

'Yes,' he replied; 'he told me how to do it. I saw him go up to a gate,' said he, 'and put his arm over it, and as I thought, as he had hold of one of the bars, that he was mistaking it for "a heaver," and trying to lift it, to get through into the field, I sang out to him,' said George, "'Druce, that's a gate! Don't you see the lock on it? Lift at the hinge-post, man, if you want to open it.'"

"All right," said he; "come here a bit." So I went.

“Have some sherry, old man,” said I, taking out my flask; “you are rather whitish. What is it?” “Only the shoulder, George,” said he. “I have had it out before, and got it in then myself, just as you see, by hanging to a gate; but as you are here, you may as well help a fellow. Just hold our horses, Alfred, while we squat,” said he to Parsons; he got off right,’ said George, ‘the same as I did; so Parsons took them; and down Druce slid upon the turf at once, with his shoulder close against the bottom bar. “Now grass yourself,” said he, “and kick your boot off, and drive your toe close up into my armpit. Yes, that is it,” he said as I soon did it. “Now, while you keep it there,” Druce said, “and mind you press well, get a good grip, George, of my arm and pull, till I cry ‘Hold;’ when bring the elbow to my side, and quickly.” I did so,’ said George, ‘and then in five minutes, Ted, the bone was in. So then I got my

handkerchief, and made a sling, and put him right, and helped him on his horse; and we all went on together; a merry lot of us, I can assure you.'

'How did the horses come off?' said Andrews.

'O, all right, luckily,' said Oliver; 'two or three of them barked a bit, but nothing more. If they had been hurt, it would indeed have been awkward. Druce keeps to the sling, but is right again. So, as I was saying,' continued Oliver, 'it is safest to go with a rush, as you will more often come to grief if you don't put the steam on than if you do; so fling it,' said he.

'And over-jump, perhaps,' said Ted, 'into a pit or quarry-hole.'

'Well, that you chance,' said Oliver, 'of course, I have known it happen; but O,' said he, 'they all get out, bless you, sometime or other, or they wait there patiently till somebody comes by.'

‘Not very pleasant, if there is no one about,’ said Ted.

‘Well, that depends,’ said Oliver. ‘If they have “weeds” left, they can meditate on the uncertainty of things equestrian; or hatch material for a book that would suit you—say “Ready Wrinkles for all Wretched Riders;” and if they are without, console themselves that without risk there is not any glory. Well, never mind, Ted, old fellow, there are worse than you,’ said George; ‘I think you mend.’

‘I think I do,’ said Andrews; ‘though you don’t believe it, George.’

‘Now, here we are at last at Marston Hills,’ said Oliver, as they turned to ride up a steep holloway, that was washed into ruts by the rains; and that was cut through the surface of the sandstone rock, which cropped out there, as it did also in places along the copse, that sheltered the steep hill-side, and those who were on it. ‘Talk of your

views, my boy,' said he, 'you will see one in a minute!' And George was right.

Seen in the day-time, it was a glorious contrast to that dark holloway where they were riding. One moment deepest shade, from arching boughs; the next, all light and air, and height and depth and space; compelling wonderment, inducing silence—the wish to be alone, and take your fill of that which, soon as seen, but set you thinking—thinking and wondering about the Hand that shaped it. But in the twilight, that same sense was deepened, and merged into a feeling almost awe—so vast, so weird, and so very beautiful was all that one looked on from that high hill; when evening merged one form into another, and gauzy mists and shadows softened all.

And on the hills the turf was green beneath them, and the bracken brushed against them as they rode by dropping paths, that led into a deep wood of olden

growth ; for almost all the trees were gray with age, and all the undergrowth there high and tangled ; flecking soft shadows on the golden lights, that glinted through the trees and touched the rabbits.

Then, as they went on, by many a twist and turn, down through the wood, the ferns that in the damp hollows grew high there rustled as they rode through them ; and winding through the scattered trees at the end of them, they came out upon a common—wild, uneven, and open—that, also sloping, led them to the valley, through lanes and copse, and one well-watered dingle ; till, two miles down or more, they reached the sward.

And they rode through the valley, dotted with its farmhouses and clustered cottages, and with its ricks and its barns, until they reached the church ; where in the evening light, and against the yellow of the sky—that toned the walls, and made paler

the reds of the outbuildings—the old gray tower looked blackened. And riding on by the five great yews, that are so gaunt and spectral, and that shade the tombs, about which there are legends, they reached the bridge, and went on up the banks to gain the wooded heights that rose above them; where stood the Liddiats, halfway up, and moated; a place of note, that in olden times, when people held their own, was armed.

Making their way up through the woods as the shades deepened, they pushed through the tall grasses in the thick spin-nies, and through the ferns and the gorse in ‘the rough;’ and so on by the sheep in the high pasture lands. Then clinking through the white gates in the orchards, they dipped under the apple-trees, and there met with Carlo; who, barking a loud welcome, led them beneath the poplars to the house; over the filled-up moat and through the archway, where, from the

strong high wall, the drawbridge used to drop. And there did their journey end—the Liddiats—an old and ivied, crumbling, graystone place, where they were welcomed, as twinkling lights began to dot the valley, and owls were heard down in the woods below.

Then, out from the base of that long lofty range, as the sun dipped, a ragged shadow crept—outlined by the woods above—and crossed the valley; and moving onwards, slowly swept the hills, until the last gleam there was overtaken; when the sky paled, and changed to primrose, then to green and gray; and the valley purpled, and the hills dusked over; and as the young moon showed above the trees, the sky got clear.

Rooks settled, and mists rose; and the stars came out, to watch from their blue home a world in gray—asleep and silent!



CHAPTER XIII.

ROSE BRANDON OF HAZELWOOD.

BRANDON of Hazelwood was a tenant of Archer's, and he lived at the Little Copse Farm, near the village. He and his wife were a hard-working couple and worthy people, and of their family of six, three were dead, the son was at school, and the daughters, Rose and Nellie, were at home: the one, a pretty girl of eighteen; the other, a young darling of three, and the pet of the village.

Rose, as we have seen, was a nice girl, and a very good girl too, and a great help to her mother, who was often ailing, for she could put her hand to anything; and no matter how busy she had to be, or how much she had to see to, it was all the same to her; and wherever she was, there was sure

to be good-humour about; and she was a capital girl amongst the poultry, and a dab hand at butter-making.

And as Rose was a nice bright-looking girl, with a sweet innocent face—‘a Greuze-like face,’ as Johnson had remarked—she had not wanted for admirers, young as she was; but the favoured one, and the one who was now engaged to her, was Harry Harrison, the son of a small farmer in the neighbourhood; who was only waiting until he could meet with a little farm, to make Rose his wife. Every place, however, that was to be let was at once taken, by the offer of an advance of rent from some one or other; so scarce were smaller farms, and so many were there after them—at least if they were anything like well-fruited.

But as the old people—his parents and hers—wished him to settle near them, and there was no time overpast—for Harrison was but two-and-twenty—the time went

pretty pleasantly with them; as, living at Aynsley—a village six miles distant from the Hall, and so eight from Hazelwood—he managed to ride over frequently; and as a rule, his Sundays were spent with her.

Still, were anything to offer—any little fruity place, where he could keep a few cows and some poultry, and that had a bit of land to it—he thought, as their wants were but few, they might make a start there, at all events; as the old people had saved up a hundred pounds for Rose, and he had four hundred of his own, that an uncle left him, and they were both of them, he and Rose, prudent and careful.

Rose was an especial friend of Archer's, who, retaining two rooms for himself at the farm, stayed there for some time in the hunting season, and frequently for a week at a time in the summer; so, as he said, he really seemed 'like one of the family;' as they were all quite at home with him, and

saw to his wants without fussing him; and, let him wander about as he pleased, they never hindered their work for him.

He therefore liked the place, and it did him good to be there; for in the summer especially it was wonderful what an early riser he would become. But, then, Rose was a nice girl, and feeding the fowls belonged to her; and he was partial to fowls—so he said, at least when he was there—and hence it was but natural that he should like to help her; and that fetched him out of it, for they were as early people at the Copse Farm as any in Hazelwood.

So, after he had had a potter in the cow-house, and seen the girl there fill the pails—who had always quite enough to say for herself—and been amongst the horses in the stables, and round the garden-orchard, with Bran, their doggie, on the hunt for field-mice, he would come round to meet Rose and feed the fowls; and then go with her to

the little dairy, where, under her care, everything was spotless.

Johnson spied her once there—when he was over with Archer—as she was busy butter-making, and he got very wild about it; for she was in a print dress, lilac-spotted, and a ray of sunlight that came in through the little grating—that was overhead, and showed the blue sky through it, and a trail of ivy also that came creeping in there—fell upon her hair, and made a warm patch on the quarries beyond her.

‘Such tints and form,’ said he, ‘from all those dairy things; and such a background; such nice cool colour for those pots and pans! Those milk-leads will,’ said he, ‘give breadth of colour, a neutral ground for all those pans and bowls, whose tones are good; primrose and stone-tint, purple-red and black, pure white, and cream, and some of them dove-gray. It ought to come well.

‘Beneath the slabs too, there are um-

bers and blue-blacks; those cans are silvery, those pails ash-brown; with broad softened shadows lying all about there, on crimson quarries, close to rich colour mellowed in the sun—a patch of it—from that ray that slanted downwards through the window, and caught that bit of harmonising green—that trail of ivy. A first-rate bit of colour, John,’ said Johnson; ‘kept in its place by that light pretty dress Miss Rose had on.’

‘And by the primrose pats,’ said Archer; ‘that told against the lilac that was in it.’

‘Just so,’ said Johnson. ‘I will make a picture of it.’

And he did so, then.

And from the dairy, Archer would take a turn through the daisied paddock to the little lawn in the front, which Rose made so pretty with the flowers that Kate and Florence gave her, as she was a favourite with each of them; and there he would stand a bit and listen to the birds in the

bushes, and watch the mist as it rose, smoke-like, from the meadows, and floated across to the woods, over the soft blue haze of early morning.

Then by the beds and the walks into the shrubbery, to look for birds'-nests in the honeysuckles, with often Dick the cat for company; and through the kitchen-garden to the gardener, working amidst the healthy smell of mould, or at his early meal, with Bran beside him.

‘And so,’ as Pepys would say, ‘to breakfast; for vigorous onslaught on good things provided. New milk and fresh-laid eggs and nice thick cream, and juicy home-cured hams and hissing rashers, and cut-and-come-again sirloins or ribs — good farmhouse fare.’

‘Our trouble is very great—Miss Rose and I,’ said he to Johnson, ‘with those confounded fowls. I wish that Cochin fellow was stewed up; for he has no manners, not

a bit of it. You may scuff and scout him; but he does not care. He will hold his own, and elbow all about him. I like the pigeons best,' said Archer; 'they are so pretty, and coo so lovingly, and seem so happy. We have lots of chicks, and also little ducks; young beauties, but such stuffers—waiting peas.'

'Now don't,' said Johnson; 'for you touch me there.'

'You must see them all, old man: the colts, calves, lambs, and little pigs, and gulls—a lot of them,' said Archer. 'A pity, is it not, that they must grow, and yield their charm to stern necessity? But you like seasoning, and I like mint-sauce; and as for crackling, why, pray don't name it!'

'Another tender point,' said Johnson; 'so touch it lightly.'

'I think young things are all so very nice,' said Archer, 'one feels inclined to pet them, every one, seen in their own surround-

ings, as seen here. Do you know, Johnson, almost all will come to call, and let me feed them. Dumb things soon take to those who treat them kindly; and in their own dumb way,' said he, 'will show they know it. None but a brute would ever hurt or munch them. Here in the country there is little of it, they so grow up together; but I think in the towns it is most awful.'

'It is,' said Johnson. 'If I lived there,' said he, 'I would make my face soon known amongst the carters.'

'And so would I,' said Archer; 'and so ought every man, till he can stop it. Few would believe what horses have to suffer from innate cruelty and demon temper. The horses here are all well used,' said Archer; 'the men know me, and know I look them over every morning. I am up, as you are aware, Johnson, pretty early. I like to sniff about amongst the flowers while they are wet and sparkling in the sun,

and all around is cool, and calm and quiet; and listen to the singing of the birds, and watch them darting out from tree to tree, the happy fellows, just as tame as pets—none hurt them here. You know my bedroom? Up amongst the roses that cluster round and run along the sill, and by and by will be one mass of bloom, some birds are building—piefinches. They did so last year, just below the window; that while I dressed, I looked into the nest; five little yellow beaks; 'twas very jolly. I am fond of birds,' said he; 'in fact, of all dumb things.'

'And so am I,' said Johnson.

And now that Archer was again at Hazelwood, for his usual stay there until the end of the hunting season, he became aware of the engagement of Rose to Harrison; for one day when chatting to her mother, she told him of it; and also that as soon as Mr. Harrison could meet with a small farm in

the neighbourhood, they hoped to get married.

Now it so happened that at this time Archer had a tenant at a little place of his—midway between Grantley and Hazelwood—from whom he had great difficulty in getting his rent; and as the man, Paget, had got into drinking habits, he wanted to get rid of him, as the farm at his hands was being neglected. So, turning one thing and another over in his mind, and wishing to do Rose a good turn if he could, he rode to The Quarry Farm at the ford, saw Paget, and made him this offer: that if he would turn out in two months from that day—say by May-day—he would forego the year's rent, and so let him take the stock with him. So, of course, the man closed at once, thankful of the chance.

Then John Archer had a chat with Kate, his sister; and the result of it was, that Mrs. Brandon was asked to make certain state-

ments to Mr. Harrison—but not to tell Rose till he told her to do so—and to sound him about them, whether they would or would not suit his views. So she did so; and Harrison himself had now come over to see Archer about it.

‘Rose,’ said Archer, opening the window, as she was busy with her flowers, ‘can you come in for a moment? We have no secrets from you.’

So she came.

‘I was just telling Mr. Harrison, Rose,’ said he, ‘that I want to be at a wedding the early part of May, about the first or second week; and if you think you shall both be at liberty then, I should like you to be there also. It might be of use, you know, to learn your lesson.’

‘I fear though,’ said Rose, ‘by the time poor Harry here has met with a farm, it would all be forgotten. We shall have to wait a long while yet, Mr. Archer.’

‘But you would like to get married soon, if you could?’ said he.

‘If Harry liked to, I should,’ said Rose.

‘Well, he wants to have a bit of talk with you,’ said Archer; ‘so I will leave you together, Rose, while I go to the stables.’

So then Rose was told of Archer’s offer of the farm, ‘rent free for the first year,’ if he would just see to things for him during the few months he should be out of England, ‘and at a low rent afterwards;’ and to enter on it at or before May-day, as would best suit himself, as Paget could turn out earlier if required.

When Archer returned, Rose was sobbing, from overjoy, and could only hold out her hand to him; so taking it in his own, he said: ‘Not a word, Rose. I am only too glad to be of service to you. I wish you every happiness, both of you!’

And there were few happier that night than Rose Brandon.



CHAPTER XIV.

LOVE AND LIBERTY—CHARLIE BURTON AND FLORENCE MILLS.

THE end of the month was at hand; and it was the old Squire's birthday, his sixty-ninth. And the gout, that prevented him joining the meet, and that had increased from his agitation at the escape of Florence, had now left him; so that he felt able, on this twenty-eighth day of March, to look forward to the enjoyment of the occasion, and the company of those who were coming to keep it with him—Mrs. Burton and Charlie. And the roses that had vanished for a few days from the cheeks of Florence had come again, and the agitation she had suffered had passed away; for as she was a girl of

buoyant spirits and great pluck, it took a good deal to daunt her.

Charlie had been frequent in his visits, and Mrs. Barrow and the Squire had scarcely known how to make enough of him, so thankful did they both feel that he had saved Florence. The party at Boscabel had passed off pleasantly, his mother had returned, and he had succeeded, at the Squire's request, in meeting with a horse for Florence; and it was arranged between them that he was to come early that morning, and ride him over; his mother coming afterwards in the carriage.

Mrs. Burton was going to stay at the Hall for a day or two, and then Florence was to return with her, to spend a few days at Boscabel; to meet some lady friends she had known in town, and who were coming there on a visit—Miss Smith and Miss Palmer, cousins, and daughters of old friends of Mrs. Burton.

The March winds had ceased; fern-fronds were on the commons, and ferns were in the woods; and the pale greens of the young leaves were clouding over the browns, and spreading across the tree-tops in the plantations. The birds were nesting, and the blackbirds and the thrushes were singing as they built; and the April flowers were forward in the coppices, ready to peep out at the first bidding of the warm sun. The garden beds had their colours—their purples, their gold, and their white—the almond-trees their blush, and the japonicas their scarlet; the bees were at the blossoms, the hares were in the meadows, and the rooks were quieter, and greens were thickening. Spring was at hand.

And as the rays of the morning sun fell upon the high tower\$ at the Hall, making light points upon the ivy, and bringing out the mellow tints upon the sandstone, Florence—in a gray dress, and with her sunny

hair under a black-velvet hat and white feather — came from the shrubbery; and crossing the lawn by the round fountain, met Burton, who had just cantered up the avenue, and turned into the drive. He thought he had never seen his cousin look so well, and she did not know when he had looked so handsome—for he was certainly sufficiently good-looking to be called handsome, especially when his face, as it was then, was lit up with animation—for he looked specially saucy and confident on that morning, seeing that he was going to have a whole day with his lady-love. So being at the outset well pleased with each other, the day went well with them.

‘O, what a nice horse you have, Charlie!’ said she, as he got off and shook hands with her. ‘Why it is a new one! Well, he is a love, and so like my poor bay! Why, I do think he is just the colour, and the height too—well, he is a beauty! Would he carry

me, Charlie? O, I should so like a ride on him! Has he ever had a side-saddle on him?’

‘I think he has,’ said Charlie.

‘Would you mind me having mine on him, just to see, you know? O, I should like a ride on him, that I should!’ said Florence. ‘May I, Charlie? O, do let me! I will get off if he kicks; I won’t run a risk now, if you will let me. Now do, Charlie,’ said she, ‘there’s a dear fellow!’

‘But what would your uncle say?’ said Burton.

‘He need not know,’ said she.

‘But I must go in and see him,’ said Charlie; ‘and he might keep me.’

‘Well, don’t then,’ said Florence.

‘But it is his birthday,’ said Charlie.

‘Well, he is busy at the back somewhere,’ replied Florence; ‘now don’t you go, Charlie. We could so soon get the saddle on between the bushes here,’ said she, as they

moved into the shrubbery, 'if you would wait a bit. Now do! I could send Susan for it, and she could bring it, and my skirt. I won't stay for my habit, if you will. Now do, Charlie!'

'What would you give me if I were to?' said Charlie, as they passed into the thick of it, with his arm round her.

'There is nobody looking, is there?' said Florence.

'Not a soul!' said Charlie.

So the compact being sealed, and another seal impressed as he drew her to him—to make it 'binding'—she flitted round to her morning-room and tapped at the window; and Susan, who was there 'putting things to rights,' soon after appeared in the shrubbery, her head beneath a side-saddle, and her shoulders draped with a riding-skirt.

'Shall I turn my back?' said Charlie, wishing to observe propriety.

‘Perhaps you had better,’ said Florence.

‘Say when then,’ said Charlie; ‘and I will change the saddles, and look at the laurels till I hear you.’

So in a few minutes, all being ready, and his own saddle and a half-crown placed in the hands of Susan, who wished there were more such nice young gentlemen, Charlie helped Florence into the saddle, and passed out through the wicket; and so under the sunk fence into the park, that her uncle should not see them.

‘He walks well,’ said Florence, as they went along, ‘and he has a nice mouth too.’

‘Yes,’ said Charlie; ‘and so has somebody that I know.’

‘Why, Charlie,’ said she, ‘how can you! You are quite saucy this morning.’

‘Yes,’ he said; ‘but it is you who make me so.’

‘How?’ said Florence.

‘By looking so lovable,’ said Charlie.

‘O, if you are going in for compliments, I shall be off,’ said she; and touching the bay with her heel, she cantered him to the oaks; and then turning him round, trotted back again; the horse going well, as he was of course thoroughly broken for a lady’s use. ‘Charlie, he is a dear horse! He moves beautifully,’ said Florence, as she reined up. ‘May I jump him? Just one little one, you know?’

‘What do you call little?’ said he.

‘Why, the fence at the top,’ said Florence.

‘Which is nearer five feet than four,’ said he, ‘when you are at it; and with a drop too.’

‘But I can do it,’ said she.

‘I daresay you can,’ said Charlie; ‘but it won’t do, Florry; your uncle would be angry.’

‘Well, then, the brook,’ urged Florence; ‘just over and back again?’

‘You won’t tumble into it if I let you?’ said Charlie.

‘Trust me,’ said she; and riding off, she went down to the brook, and went over it, and then jumped it back again; but instead of returning, she continued to zigzag up it till she had jumped it a dozen times; when making a circuit on the canter, she sent the horse over it again with a bound, and came up the bank at a hand-gallop.

‘That is “trust me,” is it, you young madcap?’ said Charlie, as she dropped the reins on the horse’s neck, and, half out of breath, did her hair up.

‘But you know, Charlie, we did not say how many times I was to jump it. There,’ said she, as her curls were in place again, ‘now I am ready for another. O, how I do wish I had such a beauty! You are a perfect dear,’ said Florence, patting the bay as she spoke, ‘a positive love!’

‘Am I?’ said Charlie. ‘I hope you will always think so.’

‘Now, Charlie, you know I did not mean you,’ said Florence.

‘Very pretty, very pretty indeed!’ said a well-known voice, as they passed round the sunk fence for the stables. ‘And pray whose horse are you on, you young pickle?’ said her uncle, who had met Susan with the saddle, to her utter confusion.

‘O uncle,’ said Florence, putting up her hands to her face, ‘I did not know you were there; but he is such a beauty, I could not help it, I could not indeed;’ and jumping off, she ran round to the lawn to appease him. ‘O, I wish I had such a love! I should prize him,’ said Florence.

‘Should you?’ said he. ‘And what would you give your old uncle if he could buy him for you?’

‘But he is Charlie’s,’ said Florence.

‘No, Florry, he is yours,’ said Charlie ;
‘your uncle’s present to you.’

‘And to be called “Charlie,”’ added her uncle, as Florence threw her arms round him and kissed him, and then for very joy began to whimper, that made the old man have a cold in his eyes immediately.

The day so well commenced passed well ; and in the evening, when the two cousins strolled into the garden, they prolonged their walk into the wilderness, and there, loving and loved, rested in the arbour.

‘And you will always be good to me?’ said Florence as they sat there, as she raised her blue eyes to his, and her curls touched his cheek from the closeness of it.

‘Always, my darling,’ said he, as her waist felt his pressure.

‘And never cross me?’

‘Never!’

‘Not if I am wilful?’

‘Not if you are wilful—ever so wilful, you dear girl!’

‘But if I were very naughty, Charlie, and began to pout, you know?’ pursued Florence, trying with coquettish perverseness to depreciate herself in his eyes, knowing how very safe it was for her to do so.

‘What is a good thing to take creases out, Florry?’ said Charlie, not seeming to heed her remark.

‘Creases! How funny, Charlie! Why, pressure—warmth and pressure, of course. Whatever made you ask that?’ said she.

‘To know if pouting would matter, my darling,’ was the reply; ‘but from what you say, it won’t.’

‘Why? I don’t understand you,’ said she.

‘Well, pout then, you little beauty, and I will show you,’ said Charlie. ‘We will soon have the creases out.’

‘O Charlie, now you know I did not mean that. How naughty you are!’ said she.

‘Yes, I know I am,’ said he. ‘Well, look here, Florry; give me a kiss and forgive me.’

‘You won’t ask for two, if I do?’ said she, looking particularly roguish.

‘It is never safe to promise,’ said he; ‘but I won’t if I can help it;’ and the request was complied with.

‘Stop a bit, Florry,’ said he, as she took her lips away; ‘that was not fair, you know; that was only half one.’

‘Well, there then, you naughty one;’ and the kiss was repeated.

‘Ay, that was better,’ he said, ‘but it was not a good one.’

‘Charlie, you are incorrigible!’ said she. ‘Well, there then, you naughty fellow;’ and she kissed him a third time. ‘Now, you are not to ask for another, remember, all the evening.’

‘Let me see,’ said he, as he looked at his watch, ‘what time is it now? All right,

Florry, 5.40 now, sun sets at 6; evening over, and night commences. A twenty minutes' wait. But now, I say, Florry, don't be hard upon a fellow. Would it not be better—in case, you know, anything happened, any one came, you know—to say, as the playbills have it, "twenty minutes are supposed to have elapsed," and go in for the thing at once? You know how one hankers after what one's fond of.'

'I ought not to have given you one at all,' said she; 'only I did not like to refuse you, as—'

'Yes, Florry,' said Charlie, 'as what?'

'As—as we are cousins, Charlie; but it was very wrong indeed of me to do it.'

'Was it, darling?' said Charlie. 'What, when we are engaged?'

'Now, Charlie,' she replied, 'I have not said I "will" have you.'

'No, but you were going to,' said he;

‘only, you see, you cannot talk and kiss at the same time. Can you, now?’

‘You are very naughty, very naughty indeed!’ said Florence; ‘and I have a great mind—’

‘Now, Florry, don’t you get on too fast,’ said he; ‘or you will be out of breath, and miss a word.’

‘Yes; but if you are to have all my kisses before marriage, how am I to have any for you afterwards?’ said Florence, trying to look as puzzled as possible.

‘No time like the present,’ was the reply; ‘we will leave the future to take care of itself. Besides, my darling, if such a dreadful state of things should ever come about, that you had really no more to part with, I could soon right that,’ said Charlie.

‘Could you? How, Charlie?’ asked Florence; being, no doubt, eager for information.

‘By giving them all back to you,’ he

said; 'so that you would be able to commence afresh immediately.'

'Now, you are naughty indeed!' said she, tapping his cheek with the primroses he had picked for her, and looking up at him with laughing eyes.

'You young gipsy!' said he, clipping her close to him, as he caught the glance of them, and kissing her with a smack that told of the warmth of it.

'Now, Charlie, don't. You must not,' said she, making a feeble effort to free herself. 'You will stop my breath if you—kiss me so!—you—will—really! Now, do leave off!—do—Charlie—do you hear? I know the gardener's about. You will—now, Charlie!—have him see us. . I know you will.'

'O, bother the gardener!' said Charlie, ceasing his occupation for a moment.

'No, but really, Charlie,' said Florence, 'you are rude now—Charlie!—now you

should not when I ask you not to. Now don't, there's a dear fellow. I ought, I am sure, to be quite offended with you!

'If you ought, you won't, will you?' said he, kissing her again, till her neck and her cheeks blushed alike. 'Well, now, look here, Florry,' said he, settling down a bit, 'I am going to be very good—I am indeed! What were we talking about? O, I know,' said he. 'Well, you will have me, won't you? I am a queer sort of a fellow, I know; but I say, Florry, you know I love you, don't you, now? And I will always be good and kind to you; I will indeed! And you shall always have your own way; you shall, really!

'Now, Florry; I say, Florry,' pursued Charlie, his arm still round her, 'now just look up at a fellow, do look up. You will have me, won't you? Say yes, now; you will say yes, I know. Now do say yes. Come, Florry, I will be so good to you, and always love you so much!'

‘Quite sure?’ said the wilful one.

‘Quite sure,’ said Charlie, as the white feather tipped, and he caught the sparkle of her blue eyes under it.

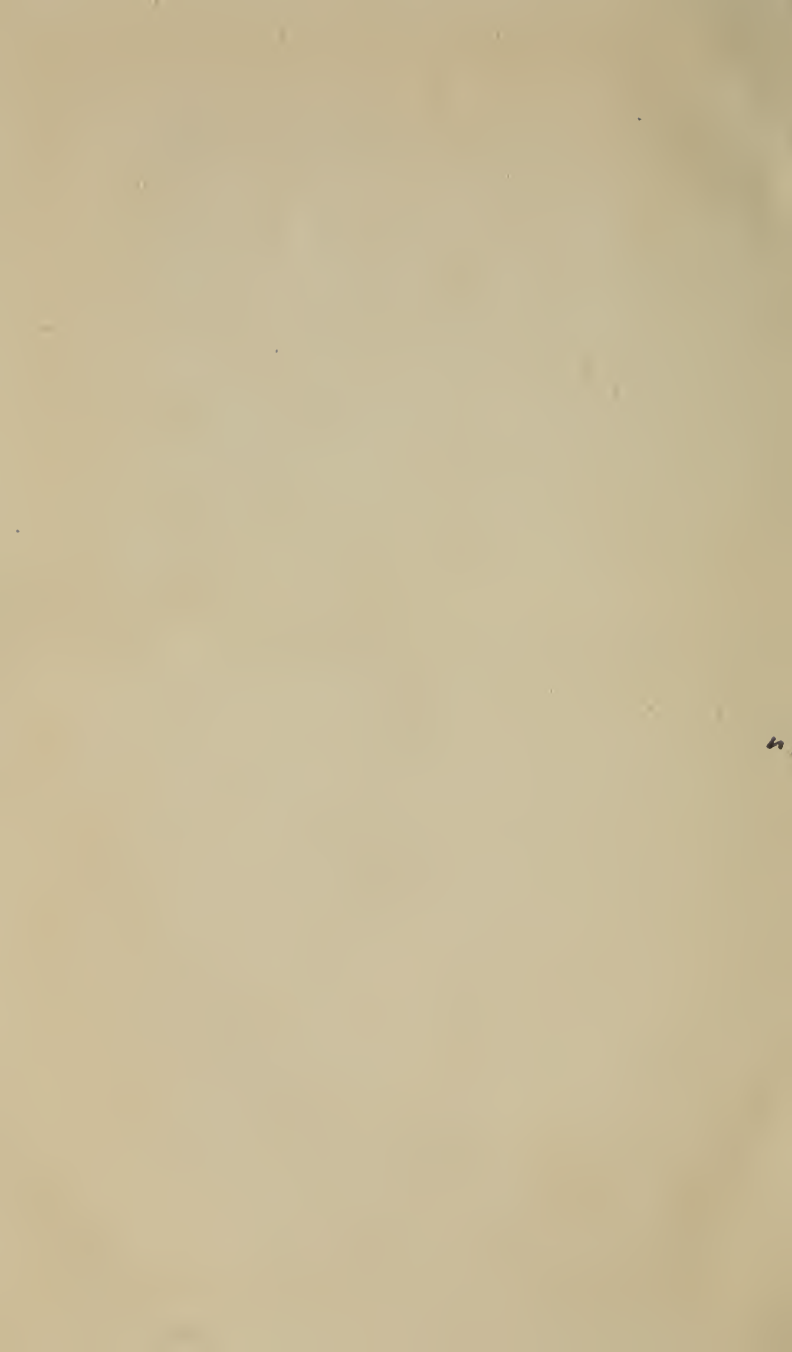
‘Then I will have you, my dear Charlie,’ she said; ‘for I do love you very much.’

And taking his hand in her own, she lifted her lips and she kissed him.

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